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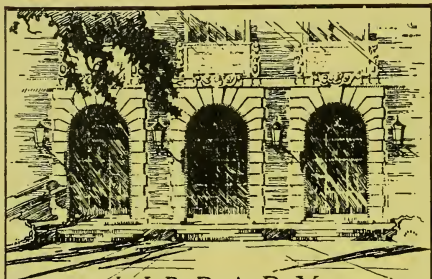
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THEY ARE ONLY COUSINS !

CHAPTER I.

But sadness on the soul of Ida fell,
And hatred of her weakness, blent with shame.

THE PRINCESS.

Julio—Wilt thou have him ?

MAID OF THE MILL.

Your language proves you still the child.

THE PRINCESS.

HEAVY was the blow that had fallen on the
young heart of Clare Wilmington.

VOL III.

B

For some time had she known that the affection which Noel Vernon bore towards herself, was not what she, alas ! felt for him ; but the intelligence communicated to her by Gertrude almost stunned her.

It seemed to her as though she now heard of Georgiana Marsden for the first time—as though all Noel’s frequent encomiums upon her had never met her eye—as though the possibility of his marrying had never entered her head.

For half an hour she lay on her bed, vainly striving to collect her thoughts, and to summon strength of mind sufficient to enable her to look at the reality of what she had heard.

Georgiana Marsden was to be—if not already so—the wife of Noel Vernon !

“ If not already so ! ”

This thought darted into poor Clare’s brain, and she started up suddenly.

“ Noel, perhaps, at this very time, is a married man ! Shall I then lie here, sinfully

cherishing my love for the husband of another?
no ! no ! Heaven forbid !”

This reflection instantly alarmed and roused the crushed energies of her pure and womanly mind, and a shudder of horror passed over her.

Away with the recollections of the past ! The struggle must be made at once. Delay would be worse than dangerous—it would be criminal ! Noel Vernon must now only live in Clare’s remembrance, as the wedded husband of Georgiana Marsden ! For her own sake—for the sake of every one near and dear to her, Clare must struggle for victory over the tender memories of her heart—she must be “up and doing !” All the strength and resolution of her spirit is needed for the encounter ; strength, which of herself, she cannot acquire.

Down on her knees she falls, and humbly and earnestly seeks support and guidance, where alone they are to be found.

When she rises, she feels that her prayer has been heard and answered ; and with a calmness, astonishing to herself, she unlocks the door at her mother's request.

"Gertie told me you were unwell, my darling girl, and that you did not wish to be disturbed ; but I could not be easy until I had seen you. It is your head you are suffering from, is it not, my love ? for your poor eyes look sadly heavy and swollen."

"My head does indeed ache, dearest mama ; but a turn in the garden will I think do me good."

"Very likely, dear ; but I will first get you some sal-volatile."

Whilst Mrs. Wilmington was gone for the restorative, Clare bathed her eyes and throbbing temples with cold water.

"You look a little better, already, love," said her mother, as she re-entered the room, "but drink this at once ; I am sure it will quiet your nerves."

Clare obeyed ; and as she returned the glass to Mrs. Wilmington, she perceived that the usually calm countenance of her mother wore an expression of excitement beyond that which anxiety on account of a slight indisposition was likely to call up.

“ Were you not surprised to hear about Noel, dear ? ”

“ Indeed I was. ”

Mrs. Wilmington was too much pre-occupied to remark the faltering tones in which these three words were uttered.

“ This is quite an eventful day in our family, ” she continued, smiling, “ first there was Harry Vernon and Lady Anne Glenmore ; then Noel and Miss Marsden ; and now—but I must leave it to papa to tell you what he says will give you even more pleasure than it has given him. God bless you, my child ! and may you ever be as happy as you deserve. ”

Mrs. Wilmington spoke solemnly ; and as

she pressed her daughter to her bosom, tears of deep emotion rolled down her cheeks.

“What is it, dearest mother?” exclaimed Clare, tremulously, “what am I now to hear?”

“Nay, darling! do not agitate yourself. Come with me to the library, and papa will tell you all.”

Clare trembled violently, as Mrs. Wilmington took her hand, and led her unresistingly, and almost unconscious, down stairs.

On entering the library, her father drew her to him, as he sat, and fondly kissed her.

“Clare! my dear child!” he said, “this day has made me the happiest of men. Read that note.”

Clare took it, and a sensation of faintness crept over her, when she recognized the handwriting of Lord Avonmere. Mechanically she cast her eyes down the first page of the note, and then returned it to her father in silence.

“What does this mean, Clare?” asked Mr. Wilmington, in no slight measure astonished, “surely, the Marquis’s flattering proposal should not thus be treated? You have not even read it.”

“I—I cannot, papa.”

“She is not well this morning, George,” said Mrs. Wilmington, who detected something of displeasure in her husband’s voice and manner, “and the suddenness with which——”

“Suddenness, Mary? Clare must, for some time, have seen that this was likely to occur. Each fresh visit she has paid to Crossleigh Priory, since the first day we spent there, cannot but have prepared her, at least in some measure, for Avonmere’s proposal. Sit down, my dear girl; and compose yourself.”

Clare did so; but she grew paler and paler every instant.

“Are you surprised at the contents of this letter?” asked Mr. Wilmington.

“Exceedingly !” faltered Clare, faintly, “never was anything more unexpected.”

“How can that be ?” resumed her father, “a man could not well be more marked in his attentions, than Avonmere has been ; which attentions you yourself, Clare, have seemed gladly to encourage. Your conduct this morning truly amazes me. Surely, *my* daughter cannot have been playing the hateful part of a coquette ?”

“Do not speak so, George !” said Mrs. Wilmington, reproachfully, as she saw Clare’s fair face burn crimson.

“What am I to suppose, then, Mary ?”

“Anything, rather than that our darling child could ever deserve the imputation you have just now cast upon her !” replied Mrs. Wilmington, forgetting, in the warmth of her maternal love and pride, the infallibility of her husband, and her usual yielding gentleness in every case where he was concerned, “Clare, I

know, regards the Marquis as a most valued friend—as a brother, in fact—and as such, has taken pleasure in his society.”

“Nonsense, Mary ! Clare must have sense to know that a man of Avonmere’s age would not be continually—”

“Papa !” said Clare, with an effort at composure, “mama is right. As a brother, I have looked upon Lord Avonmere ; nor did I ever dream of the possibility of his regarding me in any other light, than that of a sister. Had I not thought his whole heart was given to Ginevra and her child, I should have acted very differently towards him.”

“This is mere high-flown romance !” exclaimed Mr. Wilmington, warmly, “a young man’s affections are never buried in the grave of a dead wife, except in the trashy pages of a silly novel. Listen, Clare, here is a proposal from the son of one of my earliest and dearest friends. He has youth, wealth, rank, beauty

of mind and person—everything to recommend him. In this letter, he expresses the deepest affection for yourself, and declares that all his future earthly happiness depends upon your acceptance of his generous and flattering offer. He says that, until he knew you, he did not think it possible he could ever feel a second love.”

Clare sat with down-cast eyes and trembling lips, listening, as in a dream.

“*Is it possible to know a second love ?*” she asked herself.

“Avonmere,” continued Mr. Wilmington, “is already dear to me as if he were my own son ; and to see you his wife, Clare, has, for months past, been the fondest wish of my heart. How long I may be spared, God only knows ! Ours is not a long-lived family, and I sometimes think I shall not be here many years.”

“Oh, George ! do not say so !” murmured his wife.

“Mary dear,” resumed Mr. Wilmington, whose voice had now regained its usual kindly tone, “speaking of its probability will not hurry my end. It will come in God’s good time. Nay—no tears, my Mary—I did not mean to distress you.”

He took her hand, and pressed it affectionately.

“Having said thus much, my darling Clare, I leave you to consider of the Marquis’s proposal. To-morrow I shall expect to hear what answer I am to return.”

Saying which he kissed his wife and daughter, and quitted the library.

* * * * *

“Oh, mama, mama! what must I do? I cannot marry Lord Avonmere. And yet—to disappoint papa—”

“He has set his heart upon the match, Clare, and, indeed, without due consideration, you

should not decide upon this important matter. For my own part, I quite enter into your father's feelings on the subject. I would rather see you married to the Marquis, than any man I know. But I will not persuade you either way. You can read your own heart better than I can."

Clare knelt down before her mother, and leaning her head upon her lap, sobbed hysterically.

* * * * *

"Aunt Eleanor !"

Lady Vernondale started, on thus suddenly hearing her name uttered in agitated accents.

She was just about to get into bed, her mind occupied with anxious thoughts of her much-loved niece, when Clare, herself, appeared before her, her face white as the muslin wrapper which she wore.

“ I thought, and hoped, you were asleep an hour ago, my Clare,” said the Baroness.

“ I cannot sleep, Aunt Eleanor. I have prayed long and earnestly, but my mind *will* not rest. Oh, auntie dear ! advise me what to do.”

“ You mean with regard to this proposal, Clare ?”

“ Yes, yes !” returned Clare, hurriedly, as she threw her arm round Lady Vernondale’s neck, “ how shall I act ? My darling mother, I can perceive, although she says less about it, is as anxious to see me Lord Avonmere’s wife, as papa. I know not how I can disappoint them—and yet—”

The image of Noel seemed to rise before her ; and, as if to shut out the sight, she buried her face in her aunt’s bosom—that sympathizing bosom which throbbed responsive to the beatings of the poor girl’s heart.

Lady Vernondale well knew what Clare was

suffering, but she dare not trust herself to speak upon the subject.

“ You seek my advice, dear child—you seek for guidance from me. Next to your own parents, Clare, there is no one to whom your interests and happiness are more dear ; but in so important a matter as this, I know not how to advise you. Lord Avonmere’s offer—so disinterested—so honourable and straightforward—so unexceptionable in every way—is one, which, if made to my own Gertrude, I should decidedly urge her to accept.”

“ You would, Aunt Eleanor ? ”

“ And why not, Clare ? The Marquis appears to me ‘ one in a thousand ! ’ ”

“ Oh ! he is all that is excellent, noble, and good ! ” exclaimed Clare, “ and happy will be the woman who shall be his wife ! ”

“ Why should not you be that woman, dear girl ? Should *you* refuse the Marquis, I feel assured he will marry no *other*, and thus his young life will be rendered lonely and sunless.

His idolized child, even through the dark cloud that obscures his intellect, seems to have chosen you for the mother of his helplessness. Clare! were I in your place, methinks my heart would leap for joy to reflect that it was in my power—and my power alone, humanly speaking—to restore happiness and gladness to the hearth and home of such a man as Avonmere! Surely, it would be no difficult task to learn to love *him*? But, mark! I would not have you at once pledge yourself to him; nor, on the other hand, hastily reject his offer. Tell your father, that you must have time for reflection—that you cannot plight your troth, until you have thoroughly tried and examined your feelings.”

“But the Marquis will be here on Thursday,” cried Clare, piteously; yet, at the same time, experiencing much cheering comfort from the words of her aunt, “and he will expect a decisive answer.”

“Understanding each other so well as Lord

Avonmere and yourself do, Clare, you can easily intimate to him the state of your feelings ; and, if I be not much mistaken in his character, he will patiently await your final decision. Remember, dearest ! the life-long happiness of one, whom you already regard and admire in no ordinary degree, depends upon you. Do not shut your heart against him, with the preconceived notion that you *cannot* love him. Let your judgment have fair play ; and at the end of a month—”

“ But how can I tell all this to papa ? ” interrupted Clare, her good sense coinciding with what Lady Vernondale had said.

“ Leave that to me, dear ; if you do not object to your father knowing that you have made me your *confidante* in your difficulties.”

“ Oh ! Aunt Eleanor—dearest, kindest Aunt Eleanor—how can I speak my gratitude—my thanks—to you, for this fresh proof of your affection for your poor Clare ? Had you not

been here, what should I have done ? I could not have distressed dear mama by—”

“God bless you, my child !” said the Baroness, clasping her niece in her arms, “say no more to-night ; but now go to bed, and try to compose yourself to sleep, for these dear cheeks look sadly pale and wan.”

“Good-night, Aunt Eleanor ! God bless you !”

Then Clare retired to her own room, calmer and less sad than when she left it.

She breathed one short prayer, and lay down on her bed, utterly exhausted both in mind and body.

What a day had that been in Clare Wilmington’s short life !

She immediately fell into a deep sleep, which lasted until morning ; but when her maid went to call her, she was so feverish and languid that she found it was useless attempting to rise.

The servant at once apprised Mrs. Wilmington, and the medical man was sent for, who desired that his patient might be kept perfectly quiet, and he doubted not she would be quite well again in a day or two—only a slight attack of influenza !

CHAPTER II.

She will weep her woman's tears,
She will pray her woman's prayers,
But her heart is young in pain,
And her hopes will spring again,
By the sunshine of her years.

E. B. BROWNING.

The habit of obedience is very strong in such a gentle,
yielding nature as her's.

HARRY COVERDALE'S COURTSHIP.

She was born to overcome an affection formed so late in
life as at seventeen, and with no sentiment superior to
strong esteem and lively friendship—to give her
hand to another!—and that other, a man who had
suffered no less than herself under the event of a former
attachment.

SENSE AND SENSIBILITY.

FIVE months after the events related in the

last chapter, Mr. Wilmington's delight and satisfaction were crowned by the union of his daughter with William Augustus, Marquis of Avonmere: and a few weeks previously, my Lady Shirley, of Oakstone Park, was rendered the most jubilant of mamas, on occasion of Frederica's marriage with Plantagenet-Ingelram-Harold, Earl of Elverland.

Pardon me, fair ladies, for thus laconically dealing with matters matrimonial! but weddings are all, for the most part, so *very* much alike, from the lovely bride's snowy costume, down to the peerless Gunterian cake. To those, however, who are curious in such details, I would recommend a peep into the sixth volume of "Sir Charles Grandison," where everything that *could* be said on this interesting subject, *has* been said; and that, after so minute and inimitable a sort, that who would dare attempt anything new?

"But, albeit, we do not accompany our two noble bridegrooms and beautiful brides to

church, nor join them at their *déjeûnés* ; yet, we must say a few words as to what preceded the nuptials.

The *Medico* was, of course, quite wrong in pronouncing Clare Wilmington's illness to be influenza ; neither did she recover in a day or two, as he had sagaciously assured her mother.

No ; poor Clare's nerves and spirits had been tried, until they could bear up no longer ; and for three weeks, or a month, she continued to suffer from a sort of low fever, during which time, weak though she was, she would not for a moment allow herself to indulge in regretful memories or melancholy day-dreams ; but, more than once, when she awoke from a troubled sleep, did she find her face moist with many tears.

One night, as she lay pale and slumbering, with no one near her but her mother, the unconscious lips murmured words that no longer left doubts in Mrs. Wilmington's

mind as to the cause of her sweet child's malady.

The anxious watcher started, and with yearning and sorrowful love, she hung over the young girl's restless pillow, while her heart whispered—

“Eleanor *was* right, then !”—How could I have been so blind ? But yet—they were *only* cousins !—How strange it seems !”

Clare never guessed that her mother knew her secret ; but Lady Vernondale soon read in her sister's tell-tale face, that which she did not give utterance to.

True to her word, the Baroness sought an interview with Mr. Wilmington, on the day after Clare was taken ill ; but she was not called upon to broach the subject which she intended, for her brother-in-law, who was busily writing when she sought him in the library, at once settled the matter.

“What does Allen say of her, Eleanor ?”

“That there is not the slightest cause for

alarm, George, so long as the dear girl is kept quiet and free from all agitation."

"Thank Heaven !" exclaimed Mr. Wilmington, fervently, "I knew not how unspeakably precious my child was to me, until within this last day and night."

"Have you written to the Marquis, George?"

"I am just doing so. Poor Avonmere! I fear he must remain in suspense as to dear Clare's decision for some days yet. She was so strangely agitated on receiving the proposal yesterday, Eleanor, that the subject must not again be mentioned to her till she is much better. Allen is coming down stairs: I must go and ask him myself about our poor darling."

By degrees Clare recovered, and was able once more to join the little circle for a few hours in the evenings, to the delight of every soul in the house; but most especially, it would seem, to that of her father, whose tenderness and attention to his sick child had shown them-

selves in acts of almost womanlike consideration.

George Wilmington was not naturally one of the demonstrative class ; but the dread of losing his only daughter had brought all the deep affection of his heart to the surface : besides, had he not dealt somewhat harshly with her, respecting Lord Avonmere's proposal—with *her*—so gentle, so dutiful, so good ? To see her married to the Marquis was his dearest wish ; but should she still continue to show repugnance to the alliance, he determined that nothing more should be said about it.

Avonmere's inquiries after Clare were of daily occurrence ; but his name was only now and then mentioned casually before her, during her convalescence.

The attack of fever had left behind it a sensation of calm and pleasing languor, which, with the affectionate care of those around her, appeared to have lulled the spirit of the invalid into a state of dreamy composure, although the

idea of Lord Avonmere's offer often crossed her mind ; but she had not again named it to any one as yet—not even to Lady Vernondale, who, on her part, wisely abstained from alluding to it for the present.

Clare still felt the same interest in the Marquis which she had ever felt ; but to love him as her future husband—another love had yet too recently filled her heart ! At times, when she lay quietly on the sofa in the drawing-room, pondering such thoughts as these, she would suddenly look round, and find the eyes of her father or mother fixed upon her pallid face with, oh ! such anxious, holy affection !—A gentle smile would pass between them, expressing more than words ; then, Clare would close her eyes to hide the tears which rose to them, and pray that she might be enabled to school her feelings, so that she might yet conscientiously gratify the fond desire of those loved parents !

That such a consummation *did* take place, we already know.

It was with the full conviction that she should be happy with him, that Clare Wilmington, after an almost daily intercourse of four months, at last gave her hand to the Marquis of Avonmere, in the parish church of Calverley.

A letter received by Lady Vernondale from Noel, in January, had announced, that in consequence of the death of Mrs. Marsden's father, his intended marriage with his "darling, bewitching Georgie," was postponed until the summer. If Clare's heart did for a moment whisper to her—"He is *yet* free!"—she did not listen to "the voice of the charmer," but steadily pursued the path marked out for her—like the Princess, in the Eastern tale, who ascended the enchanted mount, heedless of the mocking voices which sought to turn her steps aside, and thereby cause her to forfeit the

chance of obtaining the prize she was in quest of. The first attempt at correspondence made by Clare, when sufficiently recovered to bear the fatigue of writing, was a note to Frederica Shirley, containing the news of Noel's engagement to Georgiana Marsden.

The Shirleys had made up their minds to winter at Rome, and it was there that Freddie received Clare's letter. To say that the intelligence it conveyed did not cause a certain degree of palpitatio in the bosom of our dark-eyed heiress, would be a decided fib ; but it certainly did not have the same effect upon her as upon her gentle friend.

Clare's attachment to her cousin had grown with her growth, from childhood to early womanhood.

Frederica's love for Noel Vernon, on the other hand, had sprung up suddenly, with all the warmth and force of her impulsive nature, taking by storm the ill-garrisoned fortress of her heart before she knew her danger. Like a

tyrant as he is, *Général Cupidon* rushed into the breach, carrying all before him with so high a hand, that there was no time for capitulation or parley, and so the conquered party was obliged to bow to the resistless will of the victor, leaving no choice in the matter.

“Experience teaches,” saith the Latin Grammar; and useful was the lesson she taught Frederica Shirley, as has been already shown.

Lord Elverland, who, at the earnest solicitation of Sir Robert and his Thomasina, had continued to make one of their travelling-party ever since they met in the train from Leipsic to Dresden, found Rome so every-thing that was desirable for winter-quarters, that he, as well as the Shirleys, determined on hibernating there. What Freddie had to do with his Lordship’s decision, he knows best himself.

When Clare’s note arrived, no two persons

of opposite sexes could be on more agreeable, *friendly* terms, than the Earl and the heiress ; nor did the news of Noel Vernon's intended marriage appear to make any material difference between them ; for, although Frederica might be a little more reserved towards her noble friend for a day or two, she speedily recovered her usual open bearing, and Elverland, ere long, found his hopes rising higher and higher, until they were, after all, crowned with success.

The Earl and Freddie Shirley had met just at that critical time when the young lady's heart was "on the rebound," and every one who knows any thing at all about hearts, must also know that that is, of all others, the most favorable moment for a new, or a *ci-dévant* love to "go in and win !"

Sweet ladies ! do not be disgusted with our two heroines, for so soon changing their politics. Remember ! Noel Vernon had been absent from them more than a-year, before," "a change came o'er the spirit of *their* dream !"

and, moreover, Noel was going to marry Georgiana Marsden ; so, like sensible girls as they were, they did not sit down and cry for ever, because they could not have the man-in-the moon, (for, of course, a *Benedict*, ought to be looked upon, by every woman, except his wife, in the same light as is that unobtainable lunar-beau !) but, in course of time, bestowed their fair hands where they were so ardently sought ; and, surely, neither Clare Wilmington nor Frederica Shirley need any excuse to be made for their conduct ? The Marquis of Avonmere appeared as near perfection as possible ; and the Earl of Elverland, although he *had* been extravagant, hot-headed, and wilful, became a very different sort of fellow after the first rebuff he met with from Frederica. He, as well as his lady-love, was all the better for a heart-trial.

*

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*

*

“ *Good gracious !*” exclaimed Mrs. Wiley, (*in Italics,*) as she sat reading the “ *Times*,” one morning at breakfast.

“ What can have—upon my reputation as a soldier, Sophia—so very sudden and unexpected—you almost caused me—I shall never forget poor Sparkes of the 14th, with the salmon-bone—to choke myself with my cocoa—given rise to such an exclamation ?”

“ Lady Shirley is dead.”

“ Dead !” repeated Dionysius, “ what a—poor woman who would have thought it !—relief to Sir Robert !”

“ She died last Sunday,” resumed Mrs. Wiley, who, fortunately for the Major, was too much occupied with the news to remark what he had said, “ an affection of the heart the paper says. How very sad—my poor, dear, valued friend ; to think that she should have lived only two months after her daughter became Countess of Elverland ! Ah ! she was

an excellent creature, though, like the best of us, she had her faults."

Sophia positively put her handkerchief to her eyes, and tried to speak as if she were crying.

What a dead humbug was Mrs. Dionysius Wiley !

CHAPTER III.

Rodrigo. —How sweet these solitary places are.

THE PILGRIM. *Beaumont and Fletcher.*

Bride and Bridegroom, pilgrims of life, henceforward to
travel together.

PROVERBIAL PHILOSOPHY.

Marry in haste : repent at leisure.

OLD SAYING.

AFTER a six weeks' sojourn in Scotland, the Marquis of Avonmere took home his bride to the ancient Abbey in Somersetshire, which was henceforth to be their chief place of resi-

dence ; whither Beppa and her little charge had preceded them some days.

“The young May-moon was just rising, when Clare first caught sight of her future home, standing in grey majesty, amongst masses of stately oaks and cedars. No sound disturbed the still calmness of the hour, save a few sharp caws from the startled denizens of the rookery, as the carriage-wheels grated along the gravelled sweep, and the murmur of the river flowing on between its wooded banks.

The Marquis watched, with silent delight, the surprise and admiration visible in his lovely wife's countenance, as she involuntarily stood up in the open carriage, to obtain a fuller view of the Abbey, gradually bursting forth more distinctly through the silvery haze of moonlight.

“Oh, William ! how could you have chosen to live so long at that ugly, uninteresting

Crossleigh Priory, with such a home as this?"

"Which was nearer to the Warren, my Clare — Avonmere Abbey, or Crossleigh Priory?"

Clare turned her soft, smiling eyes upon him, and placed her hand in his.

This did not look as if the young Marchioness repented of the step she had taken; at all events, as yet.

"Do you think you can be happy here, dearest? so far removed from gaiety and the 'haunts of men.'"

"Where you are happy, William, I shall be happy!"

"How like one of Ginevra's answers!" thought Lord Avonmere.

* * * * *

It was the second morning after their arrival at the Abbey.

Beneath the united branches of a pink-hawthorn and a wild-cherry, sat the master and mistress of the fair domain, which lay spread out before them ; whilst, at no great distance, the Italian, Beppa, paced up and down, with the little Lord Egremont in her arms.

Ever and anon, the black eyes were stealthily cast towards the newly-wedded pair, with an angry and sinister expression ; and whenever Avonmere's lips drew nearer to Clare's ear, as he addressed her, Beppa would mutter in a low tone to her unconscious charge.

" Vincenzo evidently recognized your voice again, love ?" said the Marquis, fixing his earnest looks upon the countenance of his wife, as though he dreaded to hear that which would crush his sanguine hopes.

" He held out his dear little arms to me," replied Clare, evasively ; for she could not bear to destroy the fond father's delusion.

" Do you remember, Clare, the first day you

went to Crossleigh Priory, how he seemed to take to you? Then, it was, I felt once more that *I could* love again—that there was yet another Ginevra in the world.”

Clare turned aside her head to conceal a reddening cheek. She had married the Marquis with the full knowledge that *all* his heart was not hers, neither was he *her* first-love; but still, she did not expect so constantly to be reminded of the passionate affection he had cherished, and did even now cherish, for Ginevra. Her woman’s spirit was grieved and wounded, whether justly or not, at the perpetual allusion to his former wife.

Clare had already asked herself more than once—

“Does he, in anything, love me for myself alone, or did he make me his wife merely because he fancied I resembled Ginerva? and because Ginerva’s child seemed happy in my arms.”

These were no pleasing thoughts for a bride

of six weeks ; especially as Clare, every day, found her own feelings were beginning to cling closer and closer to her husband—that she could give him the devotion of her whole undivided heart.

The Marquis took her hand in his, and, for the first time, remarked that the hair bracelet which Clare had so continually worn before her marriage, no longer graced her wrist.

“What has become of it, dearest?”

“I gave it to mama on our wedding-day.”

“Why did you do so? I thought you prized it.”

“I did, Avonmere ; but—”

“Do not call me by that cold, formal name, Clare—let me be always *William* to you ! None but Ginevra and my mother ever addressed me by my christian name, since I can remember ; and, except from your sweet lips, I would rather never hear it again. To Clare I must ever be *William* ! But this, *en passant*.

We were speaking of the bracelet. Why did you part with it, *carina* ?”

“Because I once heard you say, William, that no girl should ever wear such ornaments, unless she were the daughter, wife, sister, or betrothed of—”

“But was not that Gertrude Vernon’s hair ?”

“Oh ! no.”

“I understood you it was your cousin’s ?”

“It was,” returned Clare, determined on forcing herself to speak out, though she would have been as well pleased had the subject never been mooted ; “it was my cousin *Noel’s*.”

“Noel’s ?”

“Yes ; he gave me the bracelet as a keepsake, before he sailed for India.”

“A strange gift, love ; was it not ?”

“It does not appear so to me, William—Noel and I are *cousins*.”

The young Marchioness blushed as she said these words.

“And so were Ginevra Dorani and I,” was the rejoinder.

“But you did not know it, William—you did not dream of the relationship, when—when—”

“Had I known it, it would have been all the same, Clare. Had Ginevra been a thousand times my cousin, I must have loved her as I did.”

The conversation was taking a strange turn, and Clare could not but feel uneasy in some degree. True, she had ceased to love Noel Vernon, but she could not entirely banish the remembrance of that love; and now she feared lest Avonmere's morbidly sensitive eye or ear might detect either in her face, manner, or voice, any inadvertent sign of emotion or embarrassment.

“Shall we walk again, William?”

“Are we not very happy as we are, Clare?”

“ Oh ! yes ; but I thought, perhaps, Vincenzo——”

“ Beppa has taken him in doors some minutes since.”

The Marchioness turned towards where the Italian had been so lately walking up and down with the child, and felt relieved when she found Beppa had indeed disappeared ; for the *bonne's* greeting, on the night of Clare's arrival at the Abbey, had left an unpleasant impression on her mind.

“ And so, *carissima mia*,” resumed the Marquis, who, whenever most caressing in his manner, involuntarily used the soft, endearing epithets of the South, “ you gave away your cousin's keepsake because you thought by so doing you should gratify me ?”

“ Partly, William ; not altogether. What I had heard you say, found a partial echo in my own heart ; therefore I transferred the bracelet to mama.”

“ *Mille grazie, carina mia !* ” exclaimed Avonmere, pressing the hand he still held to his lips, “ for this fresh proof of your thoughtful affection. Every hour do I discover something more to love in you ! ”

His eyes met Clare's, and beautiful was the language she read in them.

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Soon after luncheon, a pony-chair drove up to the chief entrance of Avonmere Abbey, and Mr. and Lady Amy de Lacey were announced.

Clare had formerly known but little of Lady Amy, (who was not regularly introduced even at the time of her elopement), but she was, nevertheless, prepared to greet her warmly. She was, however, rather surprised, when Amy flew towards her and threw her arms around her neck.

“ Excuse me, dear Lady Avonmere, ” she

said, in an agitated whisper, "but I am so rejoiced to see one whom I knew at Calverley."

Clare felt her heart drawn at once towards the poor, young creature, banished thus early from her home, through the medium of a misguided but innocent affection, and as heartily returned her caresses.

Having introduced Amy and Algernon to the Marquis, Lady Avonmere had an opportunity of observing the appearance of her visitors.

Amy looked ill and worn, and several years older than when Clare had last seen her at the ball at Calverley Castle. Her dress was of a bygone fashion, and was evidently put on without the slightest care as to how its wearer should appear in the eyes of others. Her manner was hurried and nervous, and her girlish figure (she was not quite nineteen) thin and drooping.

Clare could have wept at this sad change.

Algernon De Lacey was dressed with even

more than his former attention to fashion and effect. His physical beauty was as striking as ever, as far as form and coloring went, but there was a difference of expression in the handsome face, especially about the mouth, which painfully struck Clare. Fretfulness, irritability, and a sort of reckless indifference, each had traced their lines upon his young countenance, which but too easily accounted for the cruel change which eighteen months had wrought in the appearance and manner of his youthful wife.

After some ten minutes, during which several trite and uninteresting observations passed, the Marquis, to whom the circumstances of Amy's rash marriage were well known, with a delicacy and tact peculiar to one of his sensitive and poetic temperament, proposed to De Lacey that he should accompany him into the grounds, to give his opinion as to the felling some of the superabundant timber, and thereby give Lady Amy an oppor-

tunity of passing a short time alone with Clare.

The Marchioness fully understood her husband's kindly intent, and remarked a smile of satisfaction on her visitor's pale face.

When Avonmere and Algernon had left the room, Amy immediately started up from her chair, and again and again kissing Clare, burst into tears.

"Compose yourself, dear Lady Amy. The heat of the day has been too much for you. Let me ring for a glass of wine?"

"No, no, thank you! only let me cry—it will do me good."

Clare's tender heart ached, as the sobbing girl rested her head upon her shoulder in all the abandonment of true sorrow.

A heart far less tender than gentle Lady Avonmere's might have ached to see the grief, and faded form, of the Earl's favourite daughter—the neglected girl-wife—the almost child-like outcast from a parent's roof!

Weep on, poor Amy ! and ease that troubled bosom of thine ! A pitying sister-woman is beside thee, who will love and comfort thee ! Weep on !

For some minutes no word was spoken ; but when Clare perceived that Amy was becoming more composed, she opened upon the subject she thought most likely to lure a young mother's thoughts from sorrowful recollections.

"Your little boy, Lady Amy—is he well ?"

"The very picture of health, dear Lady Avonmere. My Walter—he is Leybourne's God-son—is so beautiful—so like—Algeron !"

She hesitated ere she spoke her husband's name, and Clare, fearing a return of emotion, hastily said—

"Dear little fellow ! how I should like to see him !"

"I should have brought him with me to—

day," resumed Lady Amy, falteringly, "only—only I feared it might distress the Marquis to see him. The contrast might have been too painful to a father's feelings."

"But Vincenzo," said Clare, "is one of the loveliest children I ever saw."

"Indeed? I understood that Lord Egremont was terribly deformed in face and figure. Lady Ellen Dormer it was who told me so."

"Vincenzo has the face and form of a little angel," returned Clare, feelingly, "the deficiency is that of reason."

"Oh! Lady Avonmere," exclaimed Amy, "how sad a trial for the Marquis!"

"It is, indeed—a bitter one; but he is full of hope that our darling will yet become a thinking being."

"Heaven grant it!" murmured Lady Amy.

Clare silently echoed the wish.

Limehurst, Calverley, and the neighbourhood, now furnished ample subjects of conversation ; and with a sort of painful pleasure, to use an anomalous expression, did Amy De Lacey minutely question the Marchioness about all their mutual friends.

“You must have been not a little astonished, dear Lady Avonmere, at the warmth of my greeting, on my first entering this room ; but when I saw your good and beautiful face, looking just as I remembered it at Calverley, so many thrilling remembrances swelled my heart, that I forgot, for the moment, we were not old friends.”

“Forget that we have ever been anything else !” exclaimed Clare, affectionately pressing her interesting companion’s hand, “I can remember Amy Fitz-Walter ever since she was the height of this *statuette*, although we before met as scarcely more than acquaintances.”

Poor Amy's face flushed with pleasure, as she said—

“Lady Avonmere! your arrival at the Abbey has been not only the frequent and cherished subject of my thoughts by day, during the last month; but, also, of my dreams by night. You will not wonder at this, when I tell you that I have seen but two female *home-faces* since I married, until I came here to-day. Dearest mama was with me when Walter was born; but as soon as I was able to go down stairs, she was obliged to leave me, according to a faithful promise she had given to papa. Then came darling Blanche Devereux for a fortnight, who wanted me to go back to London with her; but that I could not make up my mind to do, for many reasons.”

Lady Amy could not mention her *chief* reason; which was, that she dreaded the temptations to expense and dissipation,

which a *séjour* in Town would lay open to Algernon.

“My sister Jane, I believe,” she continued, “would have come to see me, had not Mr. Churchill positively forbidden her any intercourse with one who had ‘disgraced herself and the noble name of Fitz-Walter!’ Oh! Lady Avonmere—the poor runaway has indeed ‘sowed the whirlwind,’ and is but too likely to ‘reap the storm.’”

The artless pathos of Amy’s broken voice brought the ready tears to Clare’s eyes.

“You must not talk thus sadly any more, dearest Lady Amy. Remember the beautiful Irish simile of the ‘dark cloud’ with its ‘silver lining;’ and treat me as though I were indeed a friend of ‘Auld Lang Syne.’ Whenever you wish for companionship, send for, or come to me. Will you promise this?”

“I do; and from my heart I thank you.”

The two young wives sealed their compact with a silent kiss.

"You mentioned Lady Ellen Dormer not long since. Where have you met her lately?"

"Were you not aware that the Dormers have lately purchased Rawcliffe Park, only five miles from this, and are residing there at this present time?"

"I had not the slightest idea of it. I suppose Avonmere must know it; but he has never mentioned it to me."

"Are the Dormers friends of yours, Lady Avonmere?"

"Merely bowing-acquaintances."

"I wish I could say the same," exclaimed Amy De Lacey, with a deep sigh.

"You do not like them, then, Lady Amy?"

"*Like* them? like *Lady Ellen Dormer*? Heaven knows I strive against my evil feelings; but, I fear, I *hate* Ellen Dormer!"

Clare heard these words, and beheld the white and quivering lips which uttered them, with unconcealed amazement.

“Lady Avonmere,” continued Amy, mastering her sudden emotion with a strong effort, “having revealed thus much, as it were, involuntarily, I will now tell you *all*, and you shall judge whether or not I have reason to hate Ellen Dormer.”

A feeling of delicacy at first made Clare shrink from the confession about to be made to her; but when she considered the almost friendless state of the agitated girl beside her, and knowing that she had no one of her own sex to confide in, save herself, the Marchioness lent an attentive and pitying ear to Amy’s disclosure.

“Until the Dormers came to Rawcliffe, I was happy as I could be, under the circumstances in which my undutiful conduct had placed me; for Algernon, although he did

sometimes complain (poor fellow !) of the dulness and monotony of our banishment, was uniformly kind and affectionate towards me. The Dormers arrived, and Algernon desired me to call on Lady Ellen, much against my own will ; for I already knew sufficient of her, to dread some careless or abrupt allusion to my rash marriage, which would pain me to the heart. Algernon persisted, however, and to Rawcliffe Park we went. From that day to this, I have scarcely known a moment's peace. Lady Ellen, at once opened a decided flirtation with my husband, which she continues to carry on, even before my very face. Day after day does he leave me alone, whilst he goes on excursions with the Dormers ; and sometimes he remains at the Park all night, without ever mentioning to me, beforehand, that he intends to do so. About a month ago, Algernon was confined to the house with a cold and sore-throat, and obliged to keep his bed ; during which time he daily received

notes from Lady Ellen, which he invariably destroyed, directly he had read them. I did all in my power to amuse and cheer him whilst he was ill, but to no purpose. He never thanked me for anything by word or look, and seemed not to care whether I was in the room or not. The first mild day after he was sufficiently recovered to go into the drawing-room, I offered to drive him out in the pony-chair, but he told me coldly, I need not trouble myself, as Lady Ellen Dormer had that morning written to say she would call for him in her carriage; and he added, that he wondered how I could think of asking him to go out in an open pony-chaise, so ill as he had been? did I want to become a widow? Oh! dear Lady Avonmere, that was a bitter moment! I feel that I deserve to suffer much; but not from him—not from my husband!”

Lady Amy paused, and pressed her handkerchief to her eyes. Clare knew not what to say; her own experience was, happily at fault

in so distressing a case as this. She could only, in pitying silence, press the hand of the suffering girl.

“And yet,” resumed Amy, “I do not so much blame poor Algernon. He is very young, Lady Avonmere; and, (I must own it,) but too open to the temptations of vanity. Lady Ellen is several years older than himself, and a complete woman of the world. Bold and unfeminine as she appears in the eyes of her own sex—to men, I have often heard people say, she can be irresistible, when she pleases. That Algernon finds her so, I, alas! but too well know; for she has entirely lured him from me! Now, Lady Avonmere! can you wonder when I say, I *hate* Ellen Dormer?”

“Hate is a fearful feeling,” said Clare, mildly but impressively, “pray against it, dearest Lady Amy. Your’s is truly a trying and a cruel situation; and your only consolation can come but from above. Do not des-

pond ; you have yet a wife's and mother's duties to perform—devote yourself to them, and you will, in Heaven's good time, have your reward."

"Oh ! Lady Avonmere !" sobbed Amy, "God has sent you here to be my better-angel. *You* will teach me where to seek support under my bitter trials, and how to pray for strength to bear them. And Algernon, too—my poor Algernon ! I must pray for him ! You will pray for us both, Lady Avonmere ?"

Clare spoke sweet and soothing words, as she smoothed Amy's dishevelled hair and tumbled collar.

The grating of wheels was heard, and a handsome carriage dashed past the drawing-room windows.

"The Dormers !" exclaimed Lady Amy, agitatedly pulling her veil down over her face, "can I not make my escape ?"

"I fear not," replied Clare, sincerely sym-

pathizing in Amy's distress, "there is but one door leading into this room; and the Dormers will have gained the entrance-hall, before you could cross it."

Scarcely had she finished speaking, when Lady Ellen and Mr. Dormer entered, preceded by the Marquis, and followed by Algernon De Lacey.

The usual amount of *bienséances* having been gone through, Lady Ellen, who was "got up" after a peculiarly striking sort of her own, as regarded costume, vehemently seized Clare's hand, and poured forth her delight on welcoming so charming an acquisition to the neighbourhood.

"Any new arrival would be gladly hailed," she exclaimed, volubly, "so you may imagine the *furor* consequent on the advent of the Marquis and Marchioness of Avonmere amongst us! Sad to relate, my dear Marchioness, there are not above a dozen visitable individuals within a circuit of twenty miles. I am

sure, had it not been for Lady Amy and my cousin, Mr. De Lacey—”

“Cousin ?” interrupted Mr. Dormer, a dull, heavy, hazy-looking man of five-and-forty, “I was not aware—”

“I have explained the relationship to you a dozen times, Robert,” cried Lady Ellen, “how abominably stupid you are ! Did not my brother Lionel marry Mr. De Lacey’s cousin, Emily Seaforth ? Emily, therefore, is *my* cousin, so of course *her* cousin is *my* cousin. That’s plain enough, surely ; is it not ?”

“Hum !” was Mr. Dormer’s satisfactory reply.

And “all a *hum*” the cousinship certainly was, but it answered her delectable Ladyship’s purpose for the present.

As Lady Ellen spoke, she cast a smiling glance at Algernon, upon whose face Clare observed a guilty blush, as, with downcast eyes, he turned to address a “meaningless nothing” to Mr. Dormer.

The Marquis now approached Lady Amy, who had sat silent and miserable, anxiously watching through her veil every look and word that passed between her husband and Lady Ellen, and scarcely able to contain her disgust and indignation when the latter mentioned the ("moonshine") relationship between herself and Algernon.

"I wish they *were* 'Only Cousins' !" sighed the poor girl to herself, as Lord Avonmere attracted her attention by enquiring for her little boy.

Lady Ellen now directed all the charms of her eloquence to Clare, with whom she had made up her audacious mind to be desperately intimate.

In another quarter of an hour, the visitors rose to depart.

"By-the-bye, Robert," said Lady Ellen to her dullest of husbands, with unblushing effrontery, "I want to call on Mrs. Thorold, and Mr. De Lacey wishes to see the Admiral—you

were there yesterday—so, suppose *you* drive home Lady Amy, who, I know wants to get back to her son-and-heir—and my cousin will accompany *me* to Orton Lodge. I can drop De Lacey at Avon Cottage, on my return, and take you up at the same time. You will soon have the Thorolds here, Lady Avonmere; and I wish you joy of their most lively acquaintance !”

Saying which, she made her “*adieux*,” and taking Algernon’s arm with the greatest *sang froid*, left the room.

“Do not betray my secret !” whispered Amy, as she pressed Clare’s hand convulsively; and trembling from head to foot, she accepted the Marquis’s arm to conduct her to the pony-chair, followed by Mr. Dormer.

CHAPTER IV.

Turning back the leaves of this Diary, I see many interruptions.

LADY WILLOUGHBY.

No conquest she, but o'er herself desired.

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So firm, yet soft ; so strong, yet so refined.

POPE.

So little of incident was there in the *outer-life* at Avonmere Abbey, whatever there **might** be going on in the inner-life of its inhabitants, that it may be as well to pass over the spring

and summer months, merely copying from Clare's "Journal" a few pages, touching what occurred to her and her friends during that period.

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"May 24th. —The Queen's and dear Annie Talbot's birth-day. A letter from Albert, who appears delighted with Cambridge-life, and laughs at the thought of the 'Little-go.' He fears he shall not be able to accept dear William's invitation to the Abbey during the ensuing Long-Vacation, as Papa is anxious that he should join a reading-party at Ambleside.—Mr. De Lacey drove Lady Ellen Dormer over here again to-day, and quite disgusted me by the way in which he spoke of his sweet young wife. He begs me to give her a little of my '*exquisite* taste in dress,' as he declares she is so careless about her appearance, 'that he is *ashamed* to be seen with her!'—Lady Ellen was louder and

more unbearable than ever, and conducts herself towards Mr. De Lacey in the most extraordinary way. No wonder poor Amy should be so unhappy ! I am not sorry to find that Lady Ellen and Mr. Dormer leave for Town on Thursday.—I cannot get on with old Beppa at all. She evidently hates to see me enter the nursery. Why is this ?”

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“May 25th.—When I rose this morning, I had a sort of superstitious presentiment that a disappointment awaited me, which was but too soon verified ; for the post-bag brought me a letter from my darling mother, telling me that dearest papa is suffering from a slight attack of inflammation on the chest, and that, therefore, their intended journey into Somersetshire next week must be postponed. Whenever I hear that he is in the least unwell, those words which my dear father uttered, on a cer-

tain memorable day, *will* obtrude themselves gloomily on my mind. He said—‘ Ours is not a long-lived family : I sometimes think I shall not be here many years !’ Whilst I read the letter, I could not restrain my tears ; but, my husband coming into the room at the time, consoled me so tenderly in that low, beautiful voice of his, and seemed to share my sorrow so completely, that more than half the weight of disappointment and anxiety was at once removed.—My marriage-lot has indeed been a fortunate one. Where else could I find William’s equal ? He seems almost too good for this earth !—The same post brought me a letter from darling Gertie, who has positively had an offer from the Marquis of Dunalbyn, the Duke of Northaven’s son, and has refused him ; *why*, she does not say, (I always imagined the Marquis was an especial favorite, both with Aunt Eleanor and Gertrude herself.) nor does she mention anything of having heard again from Noel. It is certainly strange that his marriage is so long

delayed. Wrote to Mama and Frederica Elverland."

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"May 28th.—Thank God ! my father is better ; but Mama says there is no chance of their being able to travel for the next three weeks. Dear Aunt Eleanor is at the Warren, assisting to nurse the invalid, and promises faithfully to send for me if there should be a relapse. Lena and Donald Grey are at the Rectory. I must ask William to let me invite them to the Abbey, before they return to Scotland. I so long to see Lena's child !—Old Beppa looked at me more *meaningly* than ever yesterday ; and when I, laughingly, told Willie, that in future I should never approach her without holding up my Neapolitan ring, to avert the spell of her '*mal 'occhio*,' he became as pale as death, and almost sternly begged me never to jest on that subject. Surely he cannot believe in

anything so absurd?—Amy De Lacey walked over by herself this evening to tea. She was dreadfully depressed, poor dear girl! The night was so warm and lovely, that dearest William and I took her home, and found Mr. De Lacey smoking a cigar in the drawing-room and reading a French novel. He expressed it as his opinion, that we had given ourselves a great deal of unnecessary trouble in escorting Amy home, as the Abbey was not much more than a mile from Avon Cottage, and she might safely have returned by herself. Willie conveyed a sharp reproach as politely as he could, which, however, merely called forth a languid laugh, and the declaration, that it was all very well for the Marquis of Avonmere to enact the romantic *rôle* of gallant ‘knight of dames,’ but that he, Algernon De Lacey, was too old and ‘used-up for such work!’ He farther added, that it was of her own accord Amy had taken flight to the Abbey, and that he did not wish in any way to interfere with her in-comings or out-goings! Can this selfish,

unfeeling coxcomb be the Algernon De Lacey of other days? How can eighteen months have so entirely changed him? I trust nothing will prevent Lady Idonia's intended visit to poor Amy."

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"June 1st.—How quietly and smoothly the days glide along! Were it not for Amy De Lacey's constant tales of domestic unhappiness and disappointed affection, I should almost forget there is such a thing as misery in the world. I am becoming so attached to little Vincenzo, and so used to his calm silence, that I no longer feel the melancholy I did, when he is now with me. The darling child still seems to be attracted by my voice, but, alas! I cannot see that he shows any increased power of intelligence. Gertie has joined Aunt Eleanor at the dear old Warren for a few days; but is to return to London next week, to stay with

Uncle Charles Talbot until her mother has fulfilled her nursing duties. Papa is nearly *quite* well again, and was to go out for an airing to-day; so I may soon hope to welcome him to *my own home!*—Aunt Eleanor has received a short letter from Noel, saying that his marriage is again postponed, at ‘*Georgiana’s own request;*’ but throws no light whatever on the why or the wherefore of this same strange request. The poor fellow also mentions that he expects to be ordered up, very shortly, to the seat of war in the Punjaub. God watch over him! prays one who loves him as a sister. I felt rather *triste* this afternoon, being quite alone; for William, as he has done once or twice before, withdrew to his *sanc-tum*, in the North Gallery, and remained there from luncheon until dinner. When he rejoined me, he looked wan and dejected, and though I exerted myself to the utmost, to cheer and amuse him, he could not shake off the depression under which he evi-

dently suffered. His thoughts have been, doubtless, busy with the past, and it is very natural that so it should be; yet—but I will not write what is in my mind. Could Avonmere so soon forget, and cease to mourn poor Ginevra, would it augur well for the depth and constancy of his love for myself? I must watch and pray unceasingly lest this new affection, though it *be* for my wedded husband, should lead me into temptation; lest I grow jealous of his fond remembrance of the dead. The Italian words of endearment, with their tender diminutives, which he so often addresses to me, and which at first sounded so sweetly in my ears, are now beginning to irritate, rather than please me; and I cannot help wishing they were spoken in plain English. I tremble when I ask my heart ‘whence springs this wish?’ In this beautiful language did he pour out his love to Ginevra—with such words as these, did he speak the fulness of happiness when Ginevra was his wife! Yes! I must

indeed keep strict watch over this weak and selfish heart of mine; and pray, lest I be led into temptation!"

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"June 3rd.—No letter from the Warren to-day, so as all the world allows, that 'no news is good news,' I may set my mind at rest with respect to dear papa. I will write and urge mama to bring him hither as soon as Mr. Allen considers it safe for him to travel: this delicious air, which has even given something like a colour to, what *some one* used to call, my 'maiden's-blush' cheek, will, I am sure, restore him in no time. My absent friends do not seem inclined to forget me, as witness long letters from Lucy Graham, Freddie, and Albert. Lucy writes from Mrs. Lorton Devereux's where she is again on a visit of a few daws, enjoying a little wild dissipation; whilst Lena and Mr. Grey take care

of her father and mother at the Rectory. Lord Leybourne's name seems to occur in every fifth or six line of her closely written letter. This looks very ominous. Dear Lucy! what a lovely Peeress she would make! She says that Lord Ashley Ferrars, Mrs. Devereux's cousin, is continually at the house, and that he has sprung up, as if by magic, from the pretty, boy-guardsman, who drank rather too much champagne at the 'Druid's Valley' pic-nic, into one of the finest and handsomest men in London. His name, also, is mentioned several times in Miss Lucy's edition of the '*Morning Post*.' Perhaps Lord Ashley is coming out in the character of a rival to his cousin, the Viscount, who shall say.

"N.B.—It would appear that the amiable Sir Samuel Culpepper, has positively been driven to let his hereditary domain for a twelve-month, in consequence of the determined and vexatious hostility carried on against him, by the no less amiable Sacharissa Rokeby! How

should I ever contrive to fill this journal, were it not for the matter afforded me by the budgets of my friends? Frederica's letter is somewhat shorter than usual, but full of affectionate remembrances of her 'sweet sister Clare,' as she still calls me; and proud 'am I of the adopted relationship, for dearest Freddie cannot be admired or loved too much! She and her husband are now at Varley Hall, and Sir Robert Shirley is with them. Frederica appears to feel her mother's death more than any one might expect, who did not know the concealed goodness of her heart so well as I do. Lord Elverland has enclosed a little note in Fred's envelope, speaking in raptures of the noble prize he has drawn in the matrimonial lottery, and giving me to understand that he owes his present felicity, in no slight degree, to the influence of a certain young marchioness, who shall be nameless! What can, dearest Freddie have been telling him? As William betook himself to his *mysterious chamber* again

This afternoon, I rode my pony over to Avon cottage, where I found Amy alone, but in the highest state of glee, as she had just received a kind letter from Lady Stalsfield, saying that Idonia should positively visit Somersetshire at the end of July. I have felt so unusually cheerful all day, that I dread, (silly, superstitious girl that I am !) lest aught should occur to turn my smiles into tears."

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"July 1st.—Alas ! too early were my forebodings verified—too soon were my smiles exchanged for tears—tears the most agonizing it has ever, hitherto, been my lot to shed. The day following that on which I last made an entry in my diary, brought a hurried line from Aunt Eleanor, desiring me to lose not a moment in flying to the Warren, if I would receive my dearest father's last blessing. He had taken cold during his first drive, and a re-

lapse had ensued, which Allen feared must prove fatal. Three hours after the receipt of the letter, William and I were on our road to London. On reaching the Warren, we found my poor mother, Aunt Eleanor, Gertrude, my brothers, Uncle Charles, and Mr. Graham assembled in the chamber of death. Never shall I forget the expression which lighted up my loved father's wan countenance, as he beheld William and me enter the darkened room !

“ ‘My God, I thank Thee !’ he gasped, as he clasped his dear arms around me. He then took my husband's hands in his own, and said — ‘you love her, Avonmere ?’

The look William turned upon me, was answer sufficient. Soon after our arrival, Mr. Graham administered the Holy Sacrament, and then my father slumbered for several hours. It was about nine o'clock in the evening, when we were all summoned in haste, to return to the sick-room. Directly I saw the dear, strangely-altered face, I knew that all would

soon be over. My father could not speak, but he was perfectly calm and sensible, and as we each knelt down, in turn, by his bed-side, he placed his hand upon our heads, and blessed us. Before midnight he died."

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"July 6th.—My dearest husband and I returned to the Abbey the day before yesterday, accompanied by poor mama, Aunt Eleanor, Gertie, and Albert. Uncle Charles has taken Talbot back to Seagrove Rookery, there to spend the rest of his vacation. I think it would have been better for my dear mother, had she come hither directly after the funeral, but all our endeavours were vain to persuade her to leave the Warren at first. She bears her sad trial with a meek and gentle resignation, that endears her more than ever, if

that be possible, to all our hearts. My William's devotion to her, is truly that of a son! How good, how pure, how excellent he is! My husband, you have *all* my heart.

"The day succeeding that of the funeral, when Aunt Eleanor and I chanced to be alone in the garden, she gave me a full account of dearest papa's last days on earth.

"On the Sunday night before his death, as mama and my aunt were sitting on either side his bed, he was talking much about his children, and suddenly turning to the former, he said—

" 'Clare is *quite* happy with Avonmere—quite sensible of his surpassing worth, Mary?'

" 'No one can doubt it, George, who reads her letters,' was the reply.

" 'God in Heaven bless them!' murmured my father, and clasping his hands together, he seemed wrapt in silent prayer for some time.

His next words were—‘Our boys, my Mary, will doubtless marry, one of these days. Do not seek to bias their inclinations on this subject in the slightest degree. Provided they love wisely and well, let them marry whom they will. Eleanor, you, as well as Mary, mark my words.’

“My aunt says, that these few sentences gave her unspeakable relief; for, being so well aware, as she was, of papa’s hitherto unconquerable objection to a union between cousins, a conversation she had had with Gertrude, on occasion of her refusal of Lord Dunalbyn’s suit, had caused her much anxiety. Aunt Eleanor has no longer any doubt as to the reality of Gertie’s attachment to Albert; and any one, who sees them together, can form but one opinion as to its being a mutual affection. They are at this moment wandering in yonder cedar-grove, linked arm-in-arm, and looking so beautiful in the glow of their fresh youth and

young, innocent love. I wonder if Noel is married yet?"

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"July 7th.—Scarcely had I written these last words yesterday, when Aunt Eleanor entered my *boudoir*, with tears in her eyes, and looking altogether much agitated. She held an open letter in her hand, which she silently gave to me. It was from poor Noel. When I had read it, I threw my arms around my aunt's neck, and we wept together, as on the night when dearest Willie's proposal had thrown me into such a pitiable state of painful excitement. I was *then* the *Comforted*; *now*, I was the *Comforter*! Dear, dear Noel! (thank Heaven! I am able to write and think of him thus, with the calmness of a sister's love!) Who would have dreamed that Noel Vernon, of all men, would be doomed to taste the cup

of disappointed affection? Such, however, is the case, for Georgiana Marsden has proved herself worthless and designing as she is heartless and fickle! The mystery of her long-delayed marriage is now unravelled. It appears that Sir James Fenton, a middle-aged civilian of immense wealth, has for many months past been a constant visitor at Colonel Marsden's; the Colonel's eldest daughter, Louisa, being the supposed attraction. Sir James's attentions to Miss Marsden became so very pointed, that every one at last regarded them as acknowledged lovers.

“Meanwhile, the time appointed for Noel's marriage with the younger sister drew on apace; when Georgiana, at her own request, and on the plea of indisposition, desired that the eventful day should be postponed.

“Noel's regiment was suddenly ordered to the Punjaub, and three weeks after his arrival there, came the astounding intelligence, that

Georgiana Marsden had eloped with the wealthy Sir James Fenton, and had been at once married to him.

“ Dear Noel’s letter is filled with mingled expressions of outraged affection and proud anger.

“ He, and all who truly love him, however, cannot but rejoice that this unprincipled girl displayed her character in its real colours, before she became poor Noel’s wife.

“ But this is not the only cause of Aunt Eleanor’s distress. Her darling son is now exposed to all the vicissitudes and horrors of war, of which the newspapers are daily relating more fearful accounts.

“ I must put aside my journal for the present, and go down stairs ; for Albert leaves us to-morrow, to join his tutor at Ambleside, and I would not willingly miss even half-an-hour of the dear fellow’s society.



“August 4th.—Mama has made up her mind to return again to the Warren, and Aunt Eleanor is to accompany her; but, I am happy to say, Gertie will remain with me for some time yet. William is very fond of her; and, strange to say, she is a favorite with old Beppa, with whom I am on no better terms than when I first saw her. Vincenzo is growing very much, and looks stronger and healthier than when he was at Crossleigh Priory.

“By-the-bye, William tells me that Harry Vernon and Lady Anne wish to hire the Priory for a term of five years, and he thinks he shall agree to let them do so. I do not fancy the place as a residence, but, yet, I should like to be able to go there sometimes; it is so near the Warren. However, I will not interfere.

“Mama, Aunt Eleanor, and I, walked over to see Amy De Lacey to-day. She is looking

quite a different being, now that Lady Idonia is with her; and Algernon seems more like his former self. He always stood rather in awe of Idonia's good common-sense and good-natured but sharp satires; and I trust she will not spare him. Amy's little Walter is a splendid boy. I only hope, my darling, when it comes, will be like him. Oh! how I long to find myself a mother!"

* * * * *

"August 12th.—Amy and Idonia spent the day here on Tuesday last. Whilst the former and Gertie were rambling about the gardens, and William and Mr. De Lacey were gone to look at a model-farm in the neighbourhood, Lady Idonia kindly assisted me in embroidering a certain christening-frock. She told me, in confidence, that Lord Stalsfield still refuses to see Amy and Algernon, but that he will allow

the Countess to come to Avon Cottage, when Amy is again confined, as he did on the former occasion. Idonia much feels this severe determination; but says, she is sure the Earl would gladly welcome back the poor runaway, were it not for the sake of example to his younger daughters, Lady Mary and Lady Maude, who are now growing up. (Mary is to be introduced next season.) Idonia has lately been on a visit to the Vandeleurs at Vale Court, where she saw a great deal of the Elverlands, who are now with Sir Robert Shirley, at Oakstone.

“Lady Claudia has, long ere this, learned fully to appreciate dearest Freddie’s many noble and loveable qualities, and even goes so far as to allow that poor Sir Robert is a ‘kind-hearted, silly, unmeaning little man, and by no means unbearable, now that her ladyship is out of the way!’

“Lady Idonia says that nothing can be more admirable, in every point of view, than

Frederica's conduct as a wife. Under her auspices, Lord Elverland has become a totally changed character. He is a liberal patron of the Arts; a rising statesman; a considerate and judicious landlord to his tenants; and the most devoted husband in the peerage! With all my heart, I say—'May Plantagenet and Frederica De Courcy of Elverland, long live to bless one another!' I shall be exceedingly glad to see Lord Leybourne again. He is expected at Avon-Cottage in a day or two."

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August 18th.—Our darling Vincenzo has not been quite the thing for the last week, but seems pretty well again to-day. William has been morbidly anxious about him, and has withdrawn himself more than ever from Gertrude's and my society. I dread to reflect on what effect the death of that poor child might

have upon my dearest husband. When my *own* little one arrives, I fear I shall be sadly jealous of William's excessive love for Vincenzo ; but I will struggle against such feelings as this, or where will be our domestic happiness, and my own peace of mind ? The De Laceys, Lady Idonia, Lord Leybourne, and our good Vicar, joined our family dinner on Thursday ; but I was truly thankful when the day was over, for William was in miserable spirits, and seemed quite unable to rouse himself. It would appear that I was born to act *confidante*-in-general, for, after dinner, Lord Leybourne poured out to me the whole story of his love for Lucy Graham ; but the Earl will not hear of an engagement at present, and Lord Leybourne is too good a son to act directly contrary to his father's wishes ; neither would Mr. Graham sanction any step without the full concurrence of his patron. The Earl has had much to try him, in one way or another. The unfortunate career and death of his brother

Mr. Hugh Fitz-Walter, was a great blow to him ; then the elopement of Amy, and the Countess's consequent nervous attack, from which she still suffers ; besides several other matters I have heard of, must all tend to irritate a naturally hasty and proud, though kindly, disposition.

“ Now Lucy Graham would, in herself, be the fairest gem in any Peer's coronet ; yet, I can well imagine, Lord Stalsfield's disappointment on finding that his long-descended-son-and-heir has given his heart to the daughter of a country clergyman ; the Earl himself having years since fixed upon his beautiful niece, the Lady Susan Ferrars, as the future Countess of Stalsfield.”

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“ August 21st,—A dear, long letter from mama, who is going to Seagrove Rookery for a month, whilst aunt Eleanor goes to look after

her estate in Devonshire. How kind it is of her to let me keep Gertrude until September. I should be so very lonely without her, now that William is shut up in the Northern Gallery every other day. I must not forget to make out the list of new music which I want Lady Idonia to order for me, when she returns to Town with Lord Leybourne, on Friday. Poor Amy's trials will, I fear, recommence when she loses her sister. Gertrude and I must make a point of having her with us as much as possible, and I shall beg Avonmere to try what he can do to open Algernon's eyes to the cruelty and selfishness of his conduct towards his sweet little wife, who told me the other day she quite sickens at thought of Lady Ellen Dormer's return to Rawcliffe Park. Gertie and I were unable to get to the cottage to-day, in consequence of the incessant rain; so we amused ourselves by rambling all over, what she calls, the 'haunted' part of the Abbey; many rooms in which I then saw for the first

time, as, with the exception of William's *sanctum* and Beppa's domains, the North Gallery is uninhabited. I was forcibly reminded of *Emilie St. Aubert* and *Annette* in the *Castle of Udolpho*, as we pursued our peregrinations and discoveries. Gertrude was most anxious to penetrate into William's 'Blue Chamber,' as she has named his retreat, but I immediately put my veto on anything of the kind; as I have not forgotten my husband's implied, though not absolutely expressed, wish that no one should enter his study but himself, which he mentioned during my first examination of the interior of the Abbey with him. Gertie looked half-frightened, half-amused, and wholly mystified when I told her of this. She asked me if I had none of the *Fatima*-weakness in my composition? and whether I never felt tempted to break the tacit promise I had made to fulfil an imaginary wish, which had never been uttered? I replied that I had made a vow of obedience at the altar, and that there

was more than enough room in the rest of the Abbey for me, without intruding where I was not wanted. Gertrude could not understand this, and, I believe, now considers me the most matter-of-fact and unromantic being under the sun.

“That I have not felt a certain amount of very strong curiosity to peep into dearest Willie’s ‘blue chamber,’ I cannot deny; but I always repress it whenever it enters my mind. He has never offered to take me there himself, and until he do, I shall remain in ‘blissful ignorance’ of the solution of the ‘Mysteries of the Northern Gallery.’

“N.B.—An excellent title for a romance of the old school, if Gertie be inclined to exercise her talents in that line !”

CHAPTER V.

The ominous raven often he doth hear,
Whose croaking hum of following horror tells,
Begetting strange imaginary fear,
With heavy echoes like to passing bells ;
The howling dog a doleful part doth bear,
As though they chimed his last and burying knells :
Under his cave the buzzing screech-owl sings,
Beating the windows with her fatal wings.

DRAYTON.

Oh, there lie such depths of woe
In a young blighted spirit.

FELICIA HEMANS.

GERTRUDE VERNON, as we find from Clare's diary, had contrived, by some means or other,

to ingratiate herself into the favor of Vincenzo's impracticable old nurse, Beppa; whether in consequence of the perfect fluency with which she spoke the Italian language, and could talk, from personal knowledge, of the *bonne's* native-place, Naples, or what not, we cannot positively say; but, be that as it may, Gertrude was ever a welcome visitor in little Lord Egremont's nursery.

One September day, when she was going to have her accustomed chat with old Beppa, whose apartments were at the commencement of the North Gallery, her eye was attracted by a glittering object, which lay on the floor, some little way farther up the Gallery. Gertrude took it up, and found it was a ring of gold and coral, of precisely the same uncommon pattern as that which her mother had given to Clare.

Gertie, we have said, was very fond of romance and mystery, and so, the finding of this ring in the Northern Gallery of the ancient Abbey, at once, in her eyes, took the form of a

“thrilling incident !” She instantly recollected the melancholy interest with which, on occasion of the Marquis’ first visit to the Warren, he had examined a similar trinket of Clare’s, and how that he had said, with a sigh—

“I have never seen but one other exactly like this.”

The ring she held in her hand, was doubtless the “one other” to which Lord Avonmere had alluded, and of course there must be a story attached to it. Gertie would have given half her own trinkets to know what that story was. A thought struck her. She put the ring on the fore-finger of her right-hand, and went into the nursery.

The gossip which ensued, was spoken in Italian, but as we are not all such accomplished linguists as Miss Vernon, it may be as well to give a literal English translation thereof.

“Ah ! *signorina*, I began to fear you were

not coming to visit us this dull and gloomy day. My child, you see, droops his pretty head, like a weary flower, because the sun will not shine upon him. *Cospetto !* your island-sun is but chary of his smiles. But, come, *illustrissima signorina !* sit you down, and let us try to forget the wind, and rain, and gloom, whilst we talk of *bella Napoli.*"

Beppa Monti could make herself very agreeable, when any one took her fancy ; and Gertrude Vernon, who was glad of the opportunity of keeping up her Italian, found real pleasure in conversing with the old nurse, and listening to her oftentimes poetical phraseology. Beppa was in full-feather this afternoon. After Gertrude had kissed and petted Vincenzo, and drawn her chair close to the old-fashioned fireplace, for, as Beppa had said, (although it was only the beginning of September) the day was unusually

"cold, and dark, and dreary,"

she seated herself, with the determination of fishing out, if possible, something concerning the mystic ring.

"I suppose, Beppa, you, as a Neapolitan, believe in the power of the *Mal Occhio*?" began our fair Machiavel.

"Believe!" repeated the old woman, crossing herself and the child most diligently, "who dare doubt? San Gennaro guard us! the *Mal Occhio* is no fancy."

Beppa Monti shuddered, as she spoke, with genuine awe and terror.

"Such a ring as this, I was told at Naples, is a sure protection against the evil influence," said Gertrude, holding up her right-hand, and closely observing the Italian's countenance as she did so.

"*Buon' Cielo*?" cried Beppa, seizing the upraised finger, and eagerly scanning the ring, "where did the *signorina* get this? It was Madonna Ginevra's!"

"I picked it up in the gallery," replied

Gertrude, delighted at the success of her stratagem, so far.

“ *Il signor Marchese* must have dropped it,” said Beppa, “or perhaps it may belong to *la Marchesa* ; she has one like Ginevra’s.”

“ It is not my cousin’s,” returned Gertrude, “ I know *hers* was on her finger, when I came up stairs.”

“ It is that which belonged to my angel,” resumed the nurse, having drawn off the ring, and pointing out the initials G. D. engraved on the inside of it, “ her mother gave it to her. A useless gift it proved, poor child !”

“ Why, useless, Beppa ?”

“ The donor was a heretic, *signorina*,” answered the old woman, shaking her head, “ and so the ring had no power to shield its wearer from the withering blight.”

Gertrude’s interest was becoming intense ; but she feared, if she followed up the subject too closely, with especial reference to Ginevra,

that Beppa might perceive her drift, and refuse to say any more.

“Did you, yourself, ever see a person with the *Mal Occhio*?”

“Several; but I took good care not to meet their glances. There was Nicolo Brunelli, a muleteer at Sorento; and Fra Agostino, the Carthusian; and old Livia Doni of Portici, my late husband’s grand-aunt; and half a dozen more whom I could name.”

“There are many members of noble families, too, who have the fatal gift of the *Gettatori*—are there not?”

“Alas! yes, *signorina*. All the family Di Rosalvi are cursed with it—man, woman, and child. The *Mal Occhio* is part of the inheritance of the Rosalvi. How dark the room grows! *Santa Madre!* a storm is brewing.”

Beppa stired the fire into a cheerful blaze, and proceeded, as she looked about her, nervously—

“I have heard my mother (Heaven rest her) tell of the wealthy and beautiful young Contessina Amalia di Spezzaro, whose lovers—more than woman ever had before or since—all fell victims to her fatal glance. And then there was the Signor Maldeschi and his sister—both *Gettatori*! *Aimè*! it is very fearful!”

“When I was at Naples,” said Gertrude, “I heard much of a Principe Camillo di Losenghi, who—”

A sound, half gasp, half shriek, broke from old Beppa’s lips, and her dark, olive face seemed to turn ashy white.

Gertrude Vernon started; and even Vincenzo cowered closer to his nurse’s bosom, at that wild and sudden cry.

“What is it, Beppa, that has alarmed you?”

“That name—that hateful name!” was the reply, uttered in accents half-stifled by emotion.

“ You have heard of the Principe, then Beppa—perhaps, have seen him ?”

“ Heard of ! seen him !” repeated the Italian, hysterically, “ it was Camillo di Losenghi who destroyed my nurseling—useless was the gift of a heretic-mother to protect Ginevra from the deadly glance of the Losenghi !”

Beppa rocked herself backwards and forwards, with almost frantic energy, whilst Gertrude sat trembling with excitement opposite to her.

It was by brief snatches, and with many agitated interruptions on the part of the old woman, that Gertrude Vernon gradually drew from her the melancholy tale we here give in a condensed, and more connected form.

A few months after the Marquis of Avonmere’s marriage with Ginevra Dorani, they removed from Verona, accompanied by Beppa Monti, who had continued with the latter from the day of her birth, and looked upon the

Artist's lovely daughter, as though she were her own child.

Vincenzo Dorani had died suddenly, and Avonmere, in the hope of distracting his young wife's thoughts from the deep grief into which this unexpected event had plunged her, at once proposed change of scene ; accordingly, they visited Rome and several other interesting places, which were new to Ginevra ; amongst the rest, Naples, where they determined on settling for a time, and maintaining the strictest privacy. The appearance of the Avonmeres, however, soon drew upon them the admiring notice of the resident English, and the principal Neapolitan families, with many of whom, the Marquis was already acquainted ; but, as Ginevra had but so recently lost her beloved father, her husband gave them to understand that, for the present, they begged to decline all visiting.

One evening as they were driving along the

Strada di Toledo, which was more crowded than usual, one of their carriage-wheels became locked in that of another vehicle, which was occupied by a tall, superbly-handsome man of about eight-and-thirty, whose style of countenance at once bespoke him an Italian.

Whilst the servants were occupied in disengaging the wheels from one another, a few sentences of *politesse* passed between the Marquis and the stranger, and when the two carriages were again about to proceed in opposite directions, the latter raised his hat and bowed to Ginevra.

"What a splendid looking man!" was Avonmere's exclamation, "I never saw such a pair of eyes in my life! Did you observe them, *carina*?"

"Yes," replied Ginevra, faintly.

"What ails you *anima mia*? How pale you have turned on a sudden! Did you fear we were going to have an upset?"

"No ; it was not that, William."

"Then why are you trembling, my Ginevra ?"

"I cannot exactly tell. A strange feeling came over me, as that gentleman bowed to me," was the low reply, accompanied by a melancholy smile, "it is nothing !"

"I am afraid the air is growing too cool for my tender *fiordilisa*. We had better drive homewards."

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Finding it next to impossible to avoid society in Naples, the Marquis hired a small Villa, near Amalfi, which stood about a quarter of a mile from an ancient and stately Casa.

There was a sort of quiet solemnity about this Casa, so different to what one generally meets with in Italian dwelling-houses, that both Avonmere and Ginevra were immediately struck with it.

The second evening after their arrival at the Villa, as they were strolling beneath a grove of ilex and acacia, following a winding path, without, in the least, knowing whither it would lead them ; they suddenly came to a break in the trees, and beheld the Casa nearer than they had yet seen it before. A man was busily lading a mule with small faggots, which a female was as busily collecting and binding together.

“To whom does yonder mansion belong, my friend ?” asked the Marquis.

“To the Principe Camillo di Lonsen, *hi, eccellenza*,” replied the man, crossing himself.

“Is the Principe here at present ?”

“That is more than I can say, *monsignore*. We poor folks about Amalfi meddle little with the goings and comings of such as the Principe ; but perhaps my wife can answer your excellency’s question. Cecca knows more about everything than I do.”

“He may be here, and he may not,” said

the woman, bluntly, "as Marco says, we care not in Amalfi, how little we see of the Principe, and neither meddle nor make with him more than we can help. The last time he was at the Casa, my brother Luca served him with fish, and took the money for it from the Prince himself (the more fool Luca!) and that very night a sudden storm arose, and my brother's boat broke from her moorings. Where she drifted to, nobody knows—Luca never saw his boat again!"

"There is evidently something wrong with this Prince Camillo, in the eyes of these good Amalfians," said Lord Avonmere, laughing; as he and Ginevra resumed their walk, "the old story here, as in England, I suppose—a hard landlord!"

"Did you remark," asked the Marchioness, "how both the man and his wife crossed themselves each time they mentioned the Principe's name?"

"No—did they? I did not notice it."

As they approached nearer to the Casa Losenghi, they were more struck with its architectural details, which were of no common order ; and the silence and entire absence of anything like life about it, seeming to bespeak the non-residence of its owner, tempted them to advance nearer still, without the fear of intrusion.

The whole aspect of the place interested the romantic imagination of Avonmere, as he stood wrapt in thought, under the dark shadow of the mansion.

A sudden exclamation from Ginevra aroused him from his ideal abstraction, and turning round, he beheld the tall, handsome stranger of the Strada Toledo.

A look of mutual recognition and surprise passed between the two gentlemen.

The Marquis began an apology for having thus unceremoniously trespassed upon the domain of the Principe di Losenghi, whom he presumed he had then the honor of addressing ;

and at the same time announced his own name.

The Principe, with noble courtesy of manner, declared himself delighted at the chance which had again brought them together, and after begging an introduction to Ginevra, invited them to enter the Casa and rest awhile. There was a charm in Di Losenghi's voice and bearing, which instantly attracted the Marquis, who readily availed himself of the Principe's invitation ; and half an hour passed pleasantly away, in examining the many costly and curious objects, which adorned the spacious saloon into which he ushered his guests.

On the Avonmeres quitting the Casa, Camillo di Losenghi accompanied them nearly as far as the Villa, and before taking leave, expressed a hope that they would use his house and gardens as their own, during their stay at Amalfi.

“ What an acquisition ! ” exclaimed the

Marquis, "who would have expected to meet such a *Chevalier Bayard* in this retired spot? There is a charm—a refinement—in the Principe's conversation, manner, and appearance, I never met with until now. Well for me is it, that I wooed and won Ginevra Dorani, before she saw Camillo di Losenghi!" Avonmere looked into his wife's face with a playful smile, and started to see how pale and sad she looked.

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Scarcely any thing occurred, which Ginevra did not relate to her foster-mother, Beppa Monti.

That night, as Beppa was undressing the Marchioness, the visit to the Casa, and the meeting with its owner, formed the subject of their conversation.

"And who is this gentleman, *carissima*?"

"The Principe Camillo di Losenghi."

Beppa drew back aghast.

“What is it, *cara madre*?” asked Ginevra, in astonishment at her nurse’s look of terror.

“Ginevra, my child! avoid that fearful man as you would a cup of *acqua tofana*! He deals death and misery in his glance! Camillo di Losenghi has the *evil eye*! Even when he was a boy, before I left Naples with your mother, he was shunned as a pestilence! and now, this very evening, whilst you were out, I have been hearing from Anina, the fisherman’s daughter, tales of the most dreadful disaster and pining sickness, all caused by the *mal occhio* of this fatal man.”

Ginevra turned faint and cold, as she remembered the indescribable sensation which crept over her, when first she met the gaze of the Principe’s large, dark, melancholy eyes.

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Three months elapsed, during which an almost daily intercourse took place between the inhabitants of the villa and the Casa Losenghi, much to the distress and superstitious horror of Beppa Monti, to all of whose stories concerning Prince Camillo and the *Evil Eye*, Lord Avonmere turned a deaf ear, sometimes laughing at them, or at other times being angry with her pertinacity in relating or believing them.

Ginevra tried to do the same; but, for all that, she could not overcome the repugnance she felt to the presence of the Principe; and it was with a sickness of the heart and a secret misgiving (breathed not even to Beppa,) that she received the numerous presents of fruit, flowers, and jewelry, which he sent her as her husband's *friend*. Beppa's wild tales found but too ready an echo in the sensitive mind of her foster-child, impressed as it had ever been by a half-credence in the common superstition

of her native land, and the excitability consequent on her then situation ; for Ginevra knew that she should ere long become a mother.

Nothing could be more respectful than the delicate attention and admiration evinced by the Principe for the lovely wife of his friend, which, more than anything else, endeared him to Avonmere.

Camillo had been obliged to leave the Casa Losenghi to attend to some urgent business at Palermo, near which place he had a valuable estate, when a letter reached the villa one morning from the Dowager-Marchioness of Avonmere, written by a lady who was her companion, desiring the Marquis to set out for Paris immediately, where his mother was lying on her death-bed.

The blow was a severe one to Avonmere. He adored his mother—but then—Ginevra ? To think of her setting out on a long and fatiguing journey in her present situation, was

madness ! and yet—to leave her ! Leave her, however, he did ; promising to return to Amalfi as fast as love and money could bring him.

Alas !

The evening after Avonmere's departure, the Principe di Losenghi arrived at his Casa, and immediately made his way to the villa of his absent friend.

Without ceremony he entered, unannounced, the room where Ginevra sat.

No one was aware that he was in the house, until a piercing shriek broke the stillness of the hour, and the Marchioness, trembling and ghastly pale, rushed from the room where Camillo had found her, and throwing herself into Beppa Monti's arms, gasped forth, in accents of frenzied horror—

“ Oh, Heaven ! save me from that fearful man ! ”

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That night the idiot-boy was born.

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“Fast as love and money could bring him,” did Avonmere return to the villa near Amalfi.

He had left a dead mother, to find a dying wife.

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“Ginevra ! my blessed one ! do you not know me ? Oh ! speak ! speak, for God’s sake !”

“Is it—is it, William ?”

“Yes ! yes, mine own ! it *is* William !”

“Thank God ! Kiss me, William ! Here is our child—take it—bless it—cherish it, for my sake ! Beppa ! *amica ! madre mia !* where is my kind *Beppina ?*”

“Here, Ginevra—here, my child ! Oh !

come back to us, Ginevra—do not go, my nurseling.”

The dying girl closed her eyes, and for some minutes lay in a sort of stupor; then, suddenly, starting up in the bed, she shrieked aloud, and throwing herself into her husband's arms, she cried, with her last breath—

“*He* is here again! William! William! drive him hence!—too late—too late—*il Mal Occhio!*—*il Mal Occhio!*”

Avonmere held a corpse to his heart.



Such was the tale which caused the tears to gush from Gertrude Vernon's eyes, and echo back the sobs that broke from Beppa Monti's laboring breast, as the wind and rain sighed and wept around the old Abbey.

Small wonder it is, that the baby Earl of Egremont should never have shown the light of intellect in his beautiful, but soulless face!

Small wonder is it, that his father should now shudder at a jesting mention of the *evil eye* !

Evil, indeed, was the eye of Camillo di Losenghi, when he cast its baleful lustre on the fair form of Ginevra Avonmere—the wife of his (so-called) friend !

But evil—more evil than all—was the passion-stained heart, which gave its evil light to that eye !

Good Angels were abroad on that fatal evening, or Ginevra would not have died a spotless wife !

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“ Now, *signorina* ! who shall doubt the blighting influence of the ‘ *Mal Occhio* ? ’ ” sobbed the old woman, as she concluded her sad history, and crossed herself.

Here was food for an imaginative mind to feed upon ! but, romantic though Gertrude

Vernon was, she but too easily read the cause of the ill-fated Ginevra's death in Beppa's melancholy story, without regarding it, as the Italian did, as effected by any supernatural influence on the part of the Principe di Losenghi.

The strange sensation which oppressed poor Ginevra, on first meeting Camillo, arising, doubtless, from any cause rather than the mysterious one to which she afterwards ascribed it, was the foundation of that morbid delusion, strengthened and confirmed by the superstitious ignorance of her foster-mother, which gradually undermined the dictates of her better reason, and preyed upon her nervous system.

Had this not been so (outraged and shocked as Ginevra must have been by the vile treachery of Camillo di Losenghi) she might yet have borne-up under the dreadful insult ; but it was not to be. The imaginary curse of the *Mal Occhio* claimed another victim !

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Trembling with excitement, Gertrude sought an opportunity of finding Clare alone, and having given to her Ginevra's ring, poured forth the tale of sadness which Beppa had just related.

“Oh, William ! my poor husband !” sobbed Clare, when she had heard the heart-rending details, “why did you not, long ere this, confide your cause of bitter sorrow to me ? Who can now wonder at his depression ?”

The Marchioness then desired Gertrude herself to restore the ring to Lord Avonmere, without any comment, merely saying how she had come by it ; and determined, on her own part, not to allow her husband to perceive that she knew aught of the circumstances attendant on Ginevra's death.

CHAPTER VI.

Inez.—Come ! let us seek to learn this mystery.
My curious soul doth long to solve its doubts.
Say, shall we search the tow'r to-night ?

Elvira.—*Inez !*
Methinks'twould be a breach of honesty
Thus to abuse thy father's confidence.

Inez.—Go to ! sweet heart—a father but in name !
No confidence is there 'twixt him and me.
Do as thou wilt, Elvira ; go or stay—
For me—I'll learn my father's secret
Ere day again hath dawn'd.

Miser of Madrid.

Portia.—There are some shrewd contents in yon same
paper,
That steal the colour from Bassanio's cheek.

MERCHANT OF VENICE.

Two days after what we have even now re-

corded, the Lady Amy De Lacey and her little Walter went on a visit to the Abbey, during the absence of Algernon, who had been sent for by his uncle, the General.

Lord Avonmere, also, was away from home on business; consequently, the three ladies were left to their own devices.

Amy was full of hope that the General's summons—for this was the first time he had consented to see his nephew since his marriage—might be an omen of brighter days to come; and now that Algernon was no longer brought into daily intercourse with Lady Ellen Dormer, the young wife fondly trusted that he would be himself once more, and that ere long the domestic happiness she had anticipated with her husband might be realized.

How far Amy De Lacey's day-dream came true, time will show.

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The "*tristes Hyades*" seemed to have it all their own way: down came the rain incessantly, and the wind was due East.

The Marchioness of Avonmere was so unwell with a head-ache, and feverish cold, that she determined to remain in bed, and so Gertrude and Amy sat at breakfast alone.

"Three days more, and I may look for Algernon's return," said the latter, "I wonder if he will keep his promise, and let me hear from him this morning?"

At this moment the letter bag was brought in, and Gertrude opened it.

"There are but two," she said, "one from Avonmere to Clare; and the other for the Lady Amy De Lacey. Excuse me a few minutes, and I will take this up to Clare."

Amy's letter *was* from her husband. She felt uneasy when she saw that it bore the London postmark.

"What can have taken him to town?" she

asked herself, nervously, "General De Lacey is at Reading !"

She hastily tore open the envelope, and found about a dozen lines evidently written in a hurry.

"The Marquis will be at home to-morrow," said Gertrude, re-entering the room, and seating herself at the breakfast-table, "what news have you, Lady Amy, from your lord and master?"

"Little enough, dear !" replied Amy, disconsolately, "he writes from the '*Tavistock*,' without saying what led him to London ; and mentions not a single word of what took place between himself and the General."

Gertrude, observing how melancholy the poor girl looked, attempted to comfort her by saying—

"No news is good news ! I dare say Mr. De Lacey has some pleasant surprise in store for you, which he is keeping to announce to nyo himself.

Lady Amy shook her head sadly, and tears rose in her eyes, as she said—

“He tells me I must not look for his return for at least another week or ten days. Oh, Gertrude! you cannot imagine how unhappy this note has made me. You have, perhaps, heard from Clare, of Algernon’s strange intimacy with Lady Ellen Dormer?”

“I have.”

“Lady Ellen is in London, Gertie,” resumed Amy, the tears falling fast down her cheeks.

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The day was so wretched that the idea of walking was out of the question, and the time crept by but slowly within doors.

Amy’s spirits were low to a degree, and Gertrude found all her attempts to raise them quite in vain. She had brought down little Walter; she had sung all her merriest *barca-*

roles; read aloud a new number of Dickens; and, in fact, had done everything which she could think of to rouse her friend (for very great friends had they become). At last Gertrude bethought her of another scheme.

“Have you ever been over the Abbey, Amy?”

“No; but I hear part of it is very curious, and well worth seeing. My nurse, Dorothy, who has spent all her life in this neighbourhood, has some wonderful stories about the north portion of the building.”

“Indeed! how I should like to hear them! But what say you? shall we go on a ghost-hunting expedition?”

Lady Amy expressed her assent, and together they commenced their rambles through the oldest parts of the Abbey, which looked grim and gloomy enough, in the premature twilight of that rainy afternoon, to satisfy even the sombre taste of Mrs. Anne Ratcliffe or Mrs. Catherine Crowe.

After threading a maze of intricate passages, peeping into unused rooms, some large, and some small, but all grey and monastic-looking, and ascending and descending flights of steps and stairs of stone or oak—turning and twisting in the most unexpected and inconvenient manner, they suddenly found themselves in a lofty but dimly-lighted gallery.

“Where are we?” exclaimed Gertrude, looking about her in bewilderment, “can this be the Northern Gallery? no, surely not—we must be at the opposite end of the Abbey. I declare, Amy, I am perfectly—stay! yes, it *is* the Northern Gallery—there is the hideous portrait of old Sir Reginald de Pierrepont over that door. But how have we managed to get here? I am sure I never came to the Gallery by this route before. Rosamond’s labyrinth must be a straight road, compared to the windings of Avonmere Abbey!”

“This, then,” said Lady Amy, “must be what Dorothy calls the haunted part of the

Abbey; and it *does* look most undeniably spectral. I suppose no one occupies any of these rooms, Gertrude?"

"The Marquis's favorite groom, Luigi, sleeps in one of them, I believe; and Vincenzo's nursery is at that end of the gallery."

"How could Lord Avonmere," asked Lady Amy, "have selected such a dismal place for the child's nursery?"

"That is more than I can tell you," replied Gertrude, "Avonmere has some strange fancies. His own study, into which no one ever enters but himself, is close here. Do you see that arched doorway, with ugly carved faces on either side of it?—that is the Marquis's mysterious "Blue-Chamber," where he spends hours and hours by himself. Do you know, Amy, I would give a very great deal to get a peep into that room!"

"And what is to prevent your doing so?"

"Simply a key, which Avonmere never

will, by any chance, forget to take out of the lock !”

“Clare, of course, often goes into her husband’s study ?”

“Never !” replied Gertrude, shaking her head, “no one but the Marquis ; though, by-the-bye, I remember once to have seen his Italian servant, Luigi, coming out of the door. Is it not really mysterious ?”

“Decidedly !” answered Lady Amy, thoughtfully, “what reason can Lord Avonmere have for such secresy ?—a secret from Clare, too, whom he appears to adore !”

As she spoke, she advanced to the quaint old door in question, and turned the iron ring which served as a handle.

“Ah ! my dear Amy, it is no use trying. Luigi is gone to Crossleigh Priory with Avonmere, and one of them, doubtless, has the key. We cannot, like ‘Fatima’ and ‘sister Anne,’ satisfy our laudable curiosity here, so, let us

turn down that narrow passage, and see whether it will lead?—that is, if you be not tired?”

“Tired? — oh! no; this exploration is charming. How darling Mary and Alicia would enjoy it!”

Amy had, for the time-being, forgotten all her fears and anxiety respecting Lady Ellen Dormer and Algernon; perceiving which, Gertrude Vernon determined to prolong their rambles until the first dinner-bell should summon them back to the realities of ladylike life.

“What splendid carving!” exclaimed Lady Amy, as they entered a small apartment, entirely lined with rich, dark wood, elaborately carved; “what a pity it is the Marquis does not have it removed to one of the rooms below.”

“Clare’s housemaids have evidently heard Dorothy’s stories of the north wing of the Abbey,” said Gertrude, laughing, “did you ever see such cobwebs? I am certain they

must have been here ever since the days of 'the monks of old!'—And look at this beautiful *beaufet*!" she continued, pulling open a door in one corner of the room, and displaying four or five semicircular shelves, one above the other, supported by oaken figures of angels with expanded wings—"it reminds me of a similar cupboard I once saw at Canterbury, in an old house which had been a Priory."

"What *are* you doing, dear?" asked Lady Amy.

"Wait a minute, and you shall see. Ah! I thought so. Here is the spring, if it will but act," returned Gertrude, pressing as hard as she could at the back of one of the carved figures between the third and fourth shelf.

Amy could scarcely believe her eyes, when she saw the whole of the interior of the *beaufet*, shelves and all, slowly and heavily moving back from the right side, like a door.

"Good gracious! Gertie! what a complete heroine of romance you are! who, but you, or

some captive Lady Rosalinda, would ever have thought of hunting for secret springs in a cupboard? I had no idea such a contrivance was to be met with in these rail-road days !”

“They are not uncommon in old monastic houses,” returned Gertrude, still trying hard to force back the stiffly-moving *beaufet*, in spite of dust and cobwebs ; “push, dear Amy, with all your strength !”

And with a heavy, creaking sound, the obstruction slid aside, and gave to view a room of some size, simply furnished.

In an instant Gertrude Vernon had passed through the aperture, followed closely by Lady Amy.

They advanced but a step or two into the apartment, when both stood still, and gazed pale and breathless, upon an object which occupied the middle of the room.

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Clare, who had enjoyed some hours' refreshing sleep during the afternoon, awoke almost entirely free from head ache, and having summoned her maid, dressed herself for dinner, and descended to the drawing-room, where she was shortly joined by Gertrude and Amy.

"Really," said the Marchioness, as they sat at *dessert*, "I am decidedly the brightest of the three after all! What have Gertie and you been doing all day, Amy? you look as sombre and mysterious as William's old raven in the court! I see I must not leave you to yourself another wet day, or you will be contemplating *felo-de-se*."

Lady Amy tried to laugh, and so did Gertrude; but it was but a sorry attempt at merriment; and with a furtive glance at each other, unnoticed by Clare, they relapsed into silence.

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It might be about three weeks after this, that Mrs. Wilmington returned to Avonmere Abbey, and Gertrude Vernon went to join her mother in Devonshire.

A lovely morning tempted Clare to walk over to Avon Cottage, whilst Mrs. Wilmington consulted with the Marquis, who was guardian to Albert and Talbot, on matters of business.

Clare found Amy amusing little Walter with some shells, and looking unwell and dejected.

“My dearest Clare ! I am so glad you are come. The sight of your dear, calm face has done me good already. Oh, Clare ! my worst trial is beginning over again. The Dormers returned to Rawcliffe yesterday, and Dorothy tells me a note arrived for Algernon from Lady Ellen before I was up this morning. I fondly hoped this infatuation, on my husband’s part, at all events, had worn itself out ; for he has been more like himself since he came back from London ; but now——”

The door of the breakfast-room was noisily thrown open, and Algernon De Lacey appeared, dressed with the most scrupulous regard to fashion and effect, a riding-whip in one hand, his hat in the other.

“Where the devil is the key of the *cellarette*, Amy ? By Jove ! you are enough to try the patience of a saint, with your hidings-up and puttings away !”

Such were the words he uttered, as he stood at the door, without at first perceiving Clare—

“*Mille pardons*, my dear Marchioness !” he exclaimed, in a very different key, as he entered the room, assuming a *nonchalant* air, which, however, his heightened colour destroyed the desired effect of, “but that little wife of mine has lately become so miserly in her housekeeping, that she will do anything with her keys sooner than allow me just *une petite tasse de l'eau de vie* before setting out on my morning ride. I am sure you would not treat Avonmere in that shabby way ?”

“Lord Avonmere never indulges in stimulant,” replied Clare, coldly.

“Ah! well—*chaqu'un à son gout!*” exclaimed Algernon, with a loud laugh, “the Marquis and I are differently constituted. Where is this key, Amy? Thanks, dear! Excuse my haste, Lady Avonmere, but I have an appointment. I hope Mrs. Wilmington and the Marquis are well? Good morning! —ta-ta, Amy!”

Lady Amy looked after De Lacey as he closed the door, with eyes so melancholy, that Clare's heart melted within her.

“He is going to Rawcliffe,” murmured the poor wife, “but, Clare, much though I dread Ellen Dormer's influence, there is another temptation which—you heard him ask for the key of the *cellarette*?—he seems unable to live without unnatural excitement. Do not breathe this to a soul, Clare, if you would not break my heart! Oh! this degrading, this fatal

propensity ! My poor, poor Algernon ! what will become of you ?”

The child looked up pitifully into his mother's face, as her tears fell upon his innocent brow.

“God help you, my darling friend !” said Clare, clasping Amy's trembling hand.

For some time Lady Avonmere continued to speak consoling words, till at last Amy appeared somewhat soothed, and then the conversation took a less painful turn.

“I heard from Gertrude Vernon again yesterday ; would you like to see her letter, Clare ?”

“Very much (if you have no secrets) ; for the naughty child has not written to me for a week or ten days.”

Little Walter was now asleep on his mother's lap, who, laying him in the Marchioness's arms, opened her desk, and took from it a letter, which she placed on the table.

“ While you read it,” said Lady Amy, “ I will take Walter up stairs and put him in his cradle.”

Clare, being left alone, opened Gertrude’s letter, the first part of which contained affectionate enquiries after Amy’s health and spirits; the baby, &c., besides an intimation that the Lady Claudia Vandeleur, after having been married upwards of five years, expected to be confined in the following May, &c.; &c., &c.

All this, Clare fancied she had heard or read before, but still she went on with the perusal of the letter.

Suddenly her attention became painfully rivetted by the following paragraph, which was undoubtedly new to her :—

“ Shall you ever forget, dear Amy, our afternoon’s adventure ? I assure you I have dreamed over and over again of our visit to the North Gallery. Little did I think what *that* room contained ! Again let me entreat you to

be cautious, if dearest Clare should mention anything about Avonmere's frequent seclusion in his *sanctum*, not to hint by word or look, in the slightest degree, our knowledge of his strange secret. In her present situation, Clare's mind cannot be kept too quiet."

"This was not intended for *my* eye," said the Marchioness to herself, and turning to the commencement of the letter, she found it bore date a fortnight back.

Amy had evidently given it to her in mistake.

We will not attempt to describe Clare's emotion on reading these, to her, mysterious words; nor the numerous wild and agitating conjectures which darted into her brain. What could be this secret of her husband's, which had evidently become known to Lady Amy and Gertrude, and which they so studiously kept from her? How had they possessed themselves of it? Should she question Amy De Lacey on the subject, and desire a solution

of the enigma? At one moment she determined on pursuing this course; but then, the deep sense of honor which ever ruled her conduct, forbade such a proceeding. Avonmere must have good reasons for maintaining so strict a reserve on this one point in particular; and, therefore, in all the probity of her trusting heart, she scorned, save from his own willing lips, to gratify her curiosity!

Fair lady-reader! would you have come to the same conclusion as did Clare Avonmere, had you been placed in the same trying situation? Do you not, rather, vote her an over-conscientious goose, who deserved to be humbugged by her husband, in the end, for thus tamely permitting him to keep a secret from her?—a second secret, too! for Clare might never have learned the history of poor Ginevra's untimely fate, but for Gertrude Vernon and old Beppa Monti. Do you, from this moment, give up all interest in our young Marchioness, because she is no true woman?—

because you cannot sympathise with so unnatural, and *un-Fatima-ish*, a “daughter of Eve,” who could allow principle to overcome the dictates of curiosity? Pardon me, lady! Clare was right!

When Lady Amy De Lacey rejoined her friend, the letter was again in its envelope, and lying on the table. Amy put it back into her desk, without ever dreaming of the mistake she had made; rather wondering, though, that Clare did not utter any comment on its contents.

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The Marchioness strove all in her power to banish the oft-recurring conjectures as to what “*the room*” contained, which still deprived her of so much of Avonmere’s society; and more than once, she was half-tempted to try, by some means, to find an entrance into the forbidden apartment; but on each such occasion

principle gained the victory, and Clare remained in ignorance ; *happy* ignorance, we must not call it, for, to speak truth, her spirits were sometimes much depressed by the thoughts and doubts which obtruded themselves.

Mrs. Wilmington, albeit her mind was in general preoccupied, could not but observe how often her son-in-law withdrew himself from his little home-circle, and once remarked to Amy De Lacey, that she "wished, for Clare's sake, Avonmere were not of quite so studious a turn !"

CHAPTER VII.

Antigonus.—Blossom, speed thee well !

Winter's Tale.

Prince.—A gloomy piece this morning with it brings ;
The sun for sorrow will not show his head.

Romeo and Juliet.

AUTUMN's withered leaves "fall thick in the blast," around the venerable Abbey of Avonmere. Within its walls are anxious, but hopeful hearts; for the fair young Marchioness will, in a few hours, become a mother. Her husband is alone in the library, sometimes

pacing up and down the room, or kneeling in fervent prayer. Many are the contending emotions which sway his mind, and give such deep expression to his beautiful countenance.

Once before has a child been born to him, and the recollection of that event may well pale his cheek, and rack his soul with agony.

That *child* still lives—but where is Ginevra ?

Above lies Clare, awaiting, in silent pain, the moment so near at hand, that shall again make Avonmere a father.

Will *she*, too, go ; and leave her child with him ?

The husband shudders as he asks himself the question.

Has he not many times of late, when he has held his first-born in his arms, almost murmured against Providence, for the promise of

another babe, which may rob Ginevra's child of Clare's maternal love ? This remembrance haunts him like the voice of an accusing spirit. He knows that God is "a jealous," no less than a loving, God ! and with trembling dread he waits to hear whether his sinful murmurs will be visited upon him by the loss of Clare—his *second* Ginevra ! Busy conscience works restlessly within him, and he kneels him down again in prayer.

When he rises, calmed and strengthened, Ginevra's voice seems to whisper—

"William, be comforted ! your gentle Clare will not love less our little motherless one, because herself a mother !"

Another anxious hour elapses ; during which Avonmere's ear is strained to catch the slightest cry from the chamber over-head ; but nought, save an occasional stealthy footstep, breaks the profound quiet. At last, even the footsteps no longer sound above.

The stillness seems like that of death.

Avonmere feels the cold perspiration breaking out upon his brow and hands—his suspense amounts to agony—he rises up from his chair, and attempts to cross the room, but his brain becomes dizzy, and he sinks down again.

The library-door opens, and before he is sufficiently recovered to observe her entrance, Mrs. Wilmington's hand is upon his shoulder.

Avonmere looks up, startled and confused, into his mother-in-law's face.

A bright smile of thankful joy meets his eye, and the next instant the Marquis weeps grateful tears on Mrs. Wilmington's kindly bosom.

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Clare Avonmere has been confined a fortnight.

Pure and lovely as a white-lily, she lies on her bed, gazing in quiet rapture on the tiny face of her son, cradled in his father's arms. The Marquis looks so wistfully at his wee burthen, as he sits beside his wife !

Suddenly he raises his head, and glances towards the fire-place, where, cowering down in a low nursing-chair, frowns old Peppa Monti, with Vincenzo on her lap.

Avonmere's eyes meet those of the Italian, and in them he reads a mingled expression of sorrow and sullen anger.

Beppa has scarcely been heard to speak since the baby was born ; and nothing can induce her to touch, or even to look at him. She hates the poor innocent ! is it not her darling's rival in their father's love ? The first time she had gone into the bed-chamber, (on Clare's expressing a wish to see Vincenzo,) the monthly-nurse held up her little charge for his brother to kiss, not knowing the infant Earl's sad in-

firmity; but Beppa started back with her boy, as though some leprous thing were nigh.

“Do not take any notice, Mrs. Greene,” Clare had said; for the Italian’s action was not unseen by her, “she is a strange, but faithful creature where she loves.”

We must now hasten on with our story, merely mentioning that, during the last three weeks, a welcome letter had reached Clare from Lucy Graham, giving the glad and unexpected news of the Earl of Stalsfield’s consent to her union with Lord Leybourne, which auspicious event was to take place immediately after Christmas, when Lucy hoped nothing would prevent her dearest Clare, Mrs. Wilmington, and the Marquis, being present. All who knew sweet Lucy Graham sincerely rejoiced at the happy prospects now before her; and foremost amongst them was Clare Avonmere, to whom both Lena and Lucy had ever been as sisters.

This letter also contained a hint, gathered from what Leybourne had confided to his lady-love, that poor Amy De Lacey's banishment from Calverley Castle, was not likely to continue much longer, as the Earl could not bear the idea of his favourite child being absent on such an occasion, as the marriage of the heir of the Fitz-Walters !

“ Dear suffering Amy ! ” said Clare, to her mother, “ how I wish Lucy did not so strictly forbid me to mention this to her ! The thought of once more being amongst those she so fondly loves, would prove such balm to her aching heart ! ”

The day fixed upon for the christening of the little “ George William,” was close at hand, and the old Abbey was alive with visitors, though there were no strangers amongst them.

Sir Charles and Lady Talbot ; Mr. and Mrs. Graham, and Lucy ; Lady Vernondale and Gertrude ; Lord Elverland and Frederica ;

with Mrs. Wilmington, Albert and Talbot, made up the party, staying in the house.

A dinner was to be given to all the tenants on the estate ; and the neighbouring gentry, of course including the De Laceys, were invited to a sumptuous *déjeûné*. Christenings as well as weddings, are all very much the same, so we will merely state, that Mr. Graham performed the solemn rite, and that Gertrude Vernon, Sir Charles Talbot, and Albert Wilmington were the sponsors.

At the *déjeûné*, all those who were invited made their appearance, except Lady Ellen Dormer, who was suffering from a bad cold (so she said !) and Algernon De Lacey, who, naturally enough, was not over anxious to come into such close contact with the Grahams.

Lady Amy, also, would fain have declined, but the Rector and Lucy, the very day of their arrival at the Abbey, had made their way, with Clare, to Avon Cottage, and their united

kindness and encouragement overcame the timid dislike she had, under existing circumstances, to entering into anything like a party. When Amy met Mr. Dormer without Lady Ellen, her heart misgave her ; but she kept her thoughts to herself, fearing to mar the happiness of the day.

She was to sleep that night at Avonmere Abbey.

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The party is gradually assembling in the breakfast-room. The Marchioness is already down, when Lady Elverland makes her appearance, more radiant and beautiful than ever, closely followed by the once boyish and impetuous "Planty," now metamorphosed by the "natural magic" practised by his wife, into as manly and dignified a specimen of a rising British statesman, as our "tight little island" need proudly boast of.

“Lady Avonmere,” said Elverland, as he shook hands with Clare, “this hawk-eyed dame of mine declares she saw, at some inconceivable distance, from one of our windows upstairs, an equestrian figure dashing over that hill beyond the park-palings, at a maniacal rate; furthermore, pretending to recognize in this same flying figure, the phlegmatic and lugubrious Bob Dormer!”

“Don’t listen to his impertinent satire, dear Clare!” said Frederica laughing, “no one *but* Mr. Dormer rides in so original a style *as* Mr. Dormer, and that the flying equestrian *was* Mr. Dormer, I am perfectly certain. See! here he comes!”

And Frederica was not mistaken.

Along the avenue dashed horse and rider, as if it were a case of life and death.

“What can have happened?” exclaimed Lord Avonmere, as he hurried out into the hall, followed by Elverland.

“ Oh, Freddie !” gasped Clare, turning very pale.

“ What do you fear, love ?”

“ Amy—poor Amy De Lacey !”

“ What of her ? What has Mr. Dormer to do with Lady Amy De Lacey ?”

“ Listen to Mr. Dormer’s loud voice !” cried the Marchioness. “ Freddie ! let us seek poor Amy. Algernon has fled with Lady Ellen—it must be so.”

In half a minute her worst fears were verified.

CHAPTER VIII.

Julia—Nine times in ten, the Town's a hollow thing,
Where what things are is nought to what they
show ;

Where merit's name laughs merit's self to scorn.

The Hunchback.

He was justly accounted a skilful poisoner who destroyed
his victims by bouquets of lovely and fragrant flowers.
The art has not been lost ; nay, it is practised every
day by the World.

BISHOP LATIMER.

AGAIN the London Season is drawing to a
close.

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“ Absurd, my dear Lucy ! Not go to Lady

Elverland's, because Leybourne cannot accompany you ?”

“ It is to be a *masked* ball, remember, Blanche.”

“ And what of that ?”

“ To own the truth, Blanche—I am prude enough not quite to approve of masquerades.”

“ Reminiscences of ‘ Clarissa Harlowe and Co.,’ I suppose, eh, Lucy ?”

“ I have never read ‘ Clarissa,’ Blanche ; but—in a word, I will *not* go to Lady Elverland's without Walter.”

“ Positively, child, you will be the amusement of all Tyburnia and Belgravia ! The idea of your never appearing in public without that husband of yours ! Really, my dear girl, you must get over your *Missishness*, or you'll be quizzed, or cut, to a dead certainty—at least, by every one worth cultivating.”

“ Which would not cause me much sorrow, I can assure you, Blanche. I care very little

for the laugh of your beloved West-End world."

"Nonsense, love!" exclaimed Mrs. Lorton Devereux, impatiently, "pray, get rid of these antiquated notions of your's. A married woman should be a woman of sense, not a staid, prosy "Lucilla Stanley," or romantic 'Flora Mc'Ivor!' Leybourne little knew what a difficult task he was imposing on me, when he appointed me your *institutrice*!"

"Indeed, Blanche," returned Lucy, "I wish you would say no more about this masked ball! for, as I have already told you, I cannot think of going to it without Walter."

"Nonsense, Lucy!"

"That may be, Blanche, but it will not alter my determination."

"Well, but, my prettiest, most obstinate, and most discreet of cousins" exclaimed Mrs. Lorton Devereux, bent on gaining her point in the end, "can you tell me why Leybourne has taken it into his head to go flying over to

Colonel Vandeleur's just at a time when he is particularly wanted at home?"

"Walter wishes to go to Vale Court, and that is sufficient for me, Blanche."

"Lucy! Lucy! you are too ridiculous! Why, what a stupid little 'Modern Griselda,' you are become! When you were Lucy Graham, you were as full of fun and frolic as a kitten—but now—Lucy, Viscountess Leybourne, is as tight-laced as 'Pamela,' or any other female abomination of the hoop and bob-wig school."

Lady Leybourne laughed, and shook her head.

"Blanche, you are incorrigible!"

"*Et vous aussi, ma chère.* What do you think Ashley Ferrars will say, should you not make your appearance at Lady Elverland's? Poor boy! he will certainly require a straight waistcoat and a keeper!"

Lucy's color slightly heightened, and she turned her head away.

"A perfect piece of acting!" cried the widow.

"Acting! Mrs. Devereux—what can you mean?" exclaimed Lucy, beginning to feel rather annoyed.

"I mean *this*, Lady Leybourne—that I firmly believe you have not the remotest idea of absenting yourself from the gayest affair of the season! No, no, *ma belle*—it is only a *ruse* of your little ladyship's."

"For the last time, [Blanche," said Lucy, warmly, "I tell you I will not go *anywhere* without my husband."

"Very good, Lady Leybourne. *Nous verrons!* Good-bye, for the present, love. Remember me to your most delectable of Viscounts. *Au revoir, ma chère!*"

When Mrs. Lorton Devereux was gone, Lucy felt vexed with herself for having been annoyed at what her giddy, but kind-hearted, friend had said; but, nevertheless, did not waver in her determination of sending an excuse to the

Countess of Elverland, if Lord Leybourne *did* go to Vale Court.

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“So, nephew,” said the amiable Lady Sarah Fitz-Walter to Lord Leybourne, as they sat in the gloomy *sanctum* of the patrician spinster, “I am told your little wife has quite turned young Ashley Ferrars’s head. My good friend, Mrs. Dundas, informs me she has heard—no matter from whom—that there never lived such a quiet, but decided flirt as—”

“As whom, madam?” exclaimed Leybourne, sharply.

“Dear me, nephew, don’t be so snappish—screaming out in that way—you have quite upset me. Can you not give me time to speak?”

“I beg pardon, aunt; but, really—I—that is—I beg your pardon—pray proceed. Who is Mrs. Dundas’s ‘quiet, but decided, flirt?’”

"The Viscomtess Leybourne," replied Lady Sarah, with a spiteful, little, wheezing laugh.

"Lucy?"

"Exactly, my dear nephew—your wife."

"By heavens! Mrs. Dundas shall recal her words, or—"

Mrs. Lorton Devereux was here ushered into the room.

"How are you to-day, aunt Sarah? Ah! Leybourne, you are the identical person I want to see."

"Indeed! What about?" said the Viscount, irritably.

"*Ma foi!* how fierce. What *is* the matter, with him, aunt?"

"Nothing, nothing, Blanche," rejoined Lord Leybourne, in milder tones; "what is it you want with me, fair coz?"

"Lady Elverland's masked ball—"

"What of it, Blanche?"

"Thus much. You must know, Walter, that I have just left Lucy, who (*pauvre petite*)

is, I am sure, dying to go to it; but protests, by all her gods, she cannot do so without her Walter; although I have offered my *chaperonage*."

"I am sure she could not have better, Mrs. Lorton Devereux," remarked Lady Sarah, bowing her head to the young widow, with so *sweet* a smile.

"Lucy may do as she pleases," said Lord Leybourne, tapping his boot with his riding-whip; "I have not the slightest wish to thwart her inclinations."

"Of course not," rejoined Mrs. Lorton Devereux; "and, as Lady Sarah says, Lucy could not have a more eligible duenna than myself; and, as for a true knight, she need not despair whilst Ashley Ferrars is in Town. I never saw a more determined case in my life. Ha! ha! ha! really, Leybourne, we must keep a strict *espionnage* over your demure, little *cara sposa*, I believe."

"Ah!" observed Lady Sarah, in a solilo

quising tone, as she lifted her grim familiar, 'Wowskey,' upon her virgin-lap, "those quiet, gentle, yea-nay sort of persons are invariably the deepest in matters of flirtation and intrigue."

"Intrigue — flirtation ! Lady Sarah," repeated poor Lord Leybourne, impetuously, "what do you *now* allude to ?"

Albeit the Viscount was good, noble, and generous to a degree, he was not quite the "Thaddeus of Warsaw"—that monster of perfection—which Lena and Lucy had once represented him to Mrs. Dionysius Wiley. No, he was too easily impressed by the words or circumstances of the moment, and hastily adopted an opinion, without taking the *pros* and *cons* into consideration. His sensitive and impetuous feelings were but too soon worked upon by the designing and malevolent. Besides which, as I think I have already said, Leybourne was a wee bit inclined to jealousy.

“Oh !” replied Lady Sarah, in answer to his last angry question, as she caressed the ‘familiar,’ and kept her ill-natured eyes fixed upon its bristly coat, “not to any person, flirtation, or intrigue in particular, my dear nephew. I spoke of the demure-class generally.”

A sharp knock was now heard at the front door.

“That’s my kind friend, Mrs. Dundas. I always know her knock — downright and honest, like herself.”

Blanche Devereux coughed, to conceal a laugh.

The downrightness and honesty of a Mrs. Dundas—one of the arch-priestesses of the Scandal Club!

Leybourne suddenly sprang from his chair, and was about to beat an instant retreat, but his affectionate aunt seized him by the arm.

“Don’t be in such haste, nephew ; I have a great deal more to say to you.”

“ Really, Lady Sarah, you must excuse me ; but—”

The noble spinster did not relax her grasp, and Mrs. Dundas and Miss Jacobina Mc. Bean were announced.

The former was a diminutive being in a black satin pelisse, rather short waisted, and not too full in the skirt. Her pimple of a head was surmounted by a pert, antediluvian structure, composed of white chip and cherry-colored velvet, over which waved a plume of feathers, almost as extensive as that which graced the giant-helmet of Otranto. A large parasol, yellow gloves, and lavender boots, with black toes, finished the costume ; which had evidently been modelled after a design, of some thirty years since, in “ Ackerman’s Repository.”

Beneath the combination of chip, velvet, and feathers, peeped forth a pair of small, twinkling, restless, black eyes, which seemed to be looking all ways at once.

Mrs. Dundas’s companion — Miss Jacobina

Mc. Bean—was a raw, Caledonian single-lady-of-a-certain-age, who sported large splay hands and feet; a flaxen wig, with short curls crisping up like drake's tails, in the nape of her neck; wandering, unsettled, light-blue eyes; the highest of cheek-bones; a plenitude of freckles; a nose, long, hooked, and bony, on which strode a pair of tortoise-shell spectacles, with round "glasses; a tartan dress; amber shawl; extremely ugly straw bonnet, trimmed with plaid ribbons and artificial rowan-berries, grey silk gloves; serviceable boots; and a reticule of the same material as the dress, which was nearly as large as a school-boy's book-bag.

Such was the *outward woman* of the new arrivals.

"My dearest Lady Sarah," exclaimed Mrs. Dundas, affectionately saluting the aristocratic dame, who did not at all appear to relish this oscular demonstration of regard, "I was almost afraid I should not catch you at home, for I

know Lady Conolly expected you at lunch to-day, after Mrs. Deloraine Smith's sale of china. I hope you are well, my dear Mrs. Devereux. Lord Leybourne, I presume?"

"Yes; that's my nephew. Lord Leybourne — Mrs. Dundas. Lord Leybourne — Miss Mc. Bean. Mrs. Lorton Devereux, I don't think you have met Miss Mc. Bean before."

"I trust, my lord, your cold is better," said Mrs. Dundas, immediately tackling the Viscount.

"I was not aware, Mrs. Dundas, that I had been suffering from a cold lately!"

"Oh, dear, yes, my good lord—I assure you, Lady Conolly told me so—and when was Lady Conolly ever wrong?"

"But I have not the honor of Lady Conolly's acquaintance!"

"I am aware of that, my lord; but one of your servants and Lady Conolly's footman are cousins."

Lord Leybourne was obliged to give in.

It was no use trying to gainsay anything which came from the Lady Conolly to Mrs. Dundas.

“And, pray, how is Lady Leybourne after the fatigues of last night?” continued Mrs. Dundas, with a show of the deepest interest, although she knew no more of the young Viscountess, personally, than she did of the Man in the Moon; “I am told that she danced nearly the whole night, and that she waltzed *four times* with Lord Ashley Ferrars. I understand that Lord Ashley rushes round at a perfectly terrific pace. Poor things! I really quite feel for his partners!”

“Lady Leybourne gets on very well with him, I have no doubt,” observed Lady Sarah, quietly.

“Beggin’ your pardon, my laird,” said Miss Jacobina McBean, in a drawling, sententious strain, and with such an accent, “but I dinna think it’s oer-becomin’ in a young married leddy to be dauncin’ these foreign daunces wi’

ony man 'cept her husband—an' that na before the een o' iverybody !”

“ But don't you know, Miss McBean,” explained Lady Sarah, with another of her frost-bitten smiles, “ That Lord Ashley Ferrars is quite a privileged person ?”

“ Eh ! my Leddy Sarah, I dinna ken at a' aboot that ; but I *do* ken that, eef I weere my Laird Leybourne, I would na let *my* bonny wife—”

The Viscount's eyes, in spite of himself, flashed so angrily, that the fair Jacobina paused in her harangue, and having extracted a quaint snuff-box from her tartan reticule, she gave three distinct taps on the lid thereof, and refreshed herself with a huge pinch of *Light-Scotch*.

“ Leybourne,” said Mrs. Lorton Devereux, observing that her cousin's ire was gradually rising, and wishing to prevent a scene, “ will you be kind enough to hand me to my carriage—and, if you have nothing better to do, per-

haps you will escort me as far as Mrs. Beauchamp's ?”

Lord Leybourne readily assented, glad of so excellent an opportunity of escaping from his amiable aunt, and the other two impertinent tormentors.

* * * * *

“ Diabolical old hags !”

“ Oh, fie ! Walter !”

“ But, are they not perfect fiends of mischief, Blanche ?”

“ Detestable tabbies, decidedly, Leybourne.”

“ I declare, Blanche, I never was so near doing battle with a woman before, as with that insolent old Scotch witch ! By George ! I thought I must have knocked her down.”

“ My dear cousin, don't worry yourself about what these “Three Graces” said—they are beneath contempt.”

“ Graces !—Furies, you mean, Blanche !”

“To think,” continued the irritated Viscount, “that a relative of ours—a Fitz-Walter—should stoop to the society of such venomous, lying harpies, as this Mrs. Dundas and the Scotch-woman!—I never was so utterly disgusted in my life. These are the wretches who make happy homes miserable—who destroy, or weaken, the most cherished ties! Talk of hanging murderers, and transporting thieves—why, such women as Lady Sarah and her infernal *clique* deserve the tortures of the Inquisition!—I have paid my last visit to our respected aunt, I trust!”

CHAPTER IX.

The noble mind is ever prone to trust !
Yet love with fond anxiety is joined,
And timid tenderness is oft unjust ;
The coldness which it dreads too prompt to find,
And torture the too susceptible mind.

Mrs. TIGHE'S "*Psyche*."

Oh ! never may suspicion's gloomy sky
Chill the sweet glow of fondly trusting love !

Ditto.

ON quitting Mrs. Beauchamp's, Lord Leybourne
took leave of Blanche Devereux, and made his

way to his sister, Lady Jane Churchill's, and was fortunate enough to find both her and her *savant* partner at home.

He was shown into the library, where the scientific pair generally received their more immediate friends or relatives.

When the Viscount entered, he was rather astonished to see and hear what he *did* see and hear.

Lady Jane was seated on the sofa, and on her lap lay her puny son-and-heir, kicking and shrieking with all his tiny might, whilst the Honorable Cyprian, kneeling on the floor, manipulated the round, downy head of the poor infant after the most approved system of phrenological torture, much, it would appear, to the annoyance of that minute specimen of the *genus homo*.

Beside them stood Lady Alicia Fitz-Walter, holding one of those little be-lined and be-figured heads, which are supposed to show the different situations of "combateness" — "de-

structiveness" — "causality," etc., to which Mr. Churchill would ever and anon turn his earned eye.

So engrossed were the anxious parents with the organs of the small Cyprian, that they did not observe the increase in their family-party, until Alicia exclaimed—

"Oh ! Leybourne ! I am so glad you are come ; for, now, perhaps, this unfortunate little victim will be released from punishment. Vain have been all my expostulations with these barbarous creatures."

"Alicia," said Lady Jane, "when will you learn to speak seriously on important subjects ? My dear Leybourne," she continued, shaking hands with her brother, "this call of your's is most opportune ; I was wishing to speak to you particularly. Cyprian and Alicia are just going out to ride ; so, if you can spare me a quarter of an hour, I can communicate what I intended to write."

"I am quite *à votre service*, fair sister.

Well, Churchill, to what decision have you come with respect to your son ? is he to be a poet, a philosopher, an antiquarian, a musician, or a mathematician ?”

“ *All*, I trust,” returned Mr. Churchill, with due solemnity.

“ Now do let me put on his cap, and carry him to his nurse,” entreated Lady Alicia ; “ poor darling thing ! he has almost shrieked and struggled himself into convulsions.”

“ Pardon me !” said the Honorable Cyprian, taking the baby’s cap out of Lady Alicia’s hand, and throwing it aside, “ the boy shall never have such a thing as that on his head again. Nature evidently never intended that the seat of intellect should thus be confined and smothered up ! No more caps, if you please, dear Jane !”

“ But, Cyprian—the child will take cold.”

“ I am surprised to hear *you* express such an idea, Jane. An absurd fallacy, that, Leybourne, of covering the infant head !”

Lady Alicia now took possession of her nephew, and stealthily snatched up the prohibited cap, carried off both to the nursery, muttering something about, "ridiculous nonsense," and "looking a little fright!"

Soon after, Alicia and Mr. Churchill started for their ride; and Lord Leybourne sat down by Lady Jane.

"Of course, Lucy and you are going to Elverland House to-morrow night, Walter?"

"No, Jane, I think not; I have promised Vandeleur to go down to Vale Court, and Lucy does not seem inclined to join the Masquers without me. Why did you ask?"

"For this reason. Alicia is most anxious to go; and whilst she is my guest, I wish her to be disappointed as little as possible."

"Then why do not you take her yourself, Jane? Baby does not interfere with your movements, now, I suppose?"

"I go to a *bal masque*, my dear Leybourne? Impossible! Cyprian would think me mad

were I to propose such a folly. But I should never dream of doing so. In fact, I can but wonder at Lord Elverland allowing his wife to give such an entertainment ! Who ever heard of a masquerade, in *society*, in these days ? No one but Lady Elverland, who does nothing like anybody else, would have conceived such a perfectly *outré* notion. That, however, *en passant*. As Alicia has set her mind on this absurd affair, and mama has no objection to her going, I was in hopes that Lucy and you would have chaperoned her. Who to look to now, I know not."

Saying which, the Lady Jane Churchill sighed, as though she were weighed down by a very mountain of care.

"Blanche Devereux, I am sure, would be only too happy—" began Lord Leybourne.

"Blanche Devereux !" interrupted Lady Jane, suddenly, "Cyprian would not hear of such a thing for a moment !"

"Indeed ! Why ?"

“ You know, dear Walter, how particular Cyprian is; and ever since Blanche played that foolish trick at our pic-nic, in the ‘ Druid’s Valley,’ he has quite set his face against her.”

“ Charitable !” exclaimed the Viscount, to himself, feeling somewhat out of patience with his pedantic and narrow-minded brother-in-law; and justly fearing that Lady Jane, like Tennyson’s “ cousin Amy,” would—

“ lower to his level day by day.”

“ Mrs. Beauchamp, then ?” suggested Lord Leybourne.

“ That would *never* do,” returned his sister, shaking her hand, “ the less Alicia sees of the Beauchamps, the better. She still blushes whenever Alfred is mentioned.”

“ What of that ? Alfred Beauchamp is a capital fellow.”

“The youngest of five brothers, and without a penny!” answered Lady Jane.

“Well, Jane, I am very sorry, but I fear I cannot help you out of your dilemma; but yet—it would be cruel to disappoint poor Ally. Perhaps, after all, if I tell Lucy—”

“Do not think of allowing Lucy to go to Elverland House without you, Leybourne!” exclaimed Lady Jane.

“Why not, pray? What are you looking so mysterious about, Jane?”

“Be advised, Walter. If you cannot yourself accompany Lucy, do not attempt to change her determination of remaining at home. A masked ball is no place for a lovely and inexperienced young wife without her husband.

“I can trust Lucy,” returned the Viscount; but there was something of nervousness in the laugh, which accompanied these words, thanks to his dear Aunt, the Lady Sarah Fitz-Walter and Co.

“I do not, for an instant, doubt the purity of the sweet girl’s intentions, in any matter,” pursued Jane Churchill, “but, then, Walter, her very innocence, and entire ignorance of the ways of this wicked world, lay her open but too—”

“Jane !” exclaimed Lord Leybourne, impetuously ; struck more by the tone of his sister’s voice, than by what she was saying, “do you merely speak generally, or—”

“Excuse me, my dear brother—I would rather not answer any questions—I—”

“But I must insist on your doing so, Jane. If you have any affection left for me, you will not trifle with me Tell me—have you ever heard Lucy’s name mentioned, in connexion with that of any man besides myself?”

“Well then, Leybourne—if you oblige me to tell you—I have. I should not have thought much of it, had not Cyprian, also, from another quarter—”

“Churchill, too ?” cried the Viscount, starting up, “why, the whole world seems to know it ! Perhaps, the laugh at my expense is, at this moment, going the round of all the second and third-rate clubs in London !”

Lady Jane looked perfectly terrified at the sudden tempest she had raised ; for Lord Leybourne was now pacing up and down the library in the wildest way possible.

“Whose name did Churchill and you hear, Jane ?”

Lady Jane could not muster up courage to answer.

“Was it—was it Ashley Ferrars’s ?”

“Yes,” replied Jane, staring at him in astonishment, “why did you guess him ?”

“Oh, never mind !” returned Leybourne, pretending to turn the affair into ridicule, “ha ! ha ! ha ! how absurd I have made myself ! I might have known as much at first. Of course it was Ashley Ferrars ! The boy

acts as Lucy's page-of-honor, whenever, and wherever, we meet. If the youthful guardsman's attentions be all I have to dread, Lucy may safely go without me to Lady Elverland's *bal masque*."

"Ashley Ferrars is certainly very young," said Lady Jane, "but though he be the son of our father's sister, Walter, Cyprian tells me—"

"Half-past-five, I declare !" exclaimed Lord Leybourne, looking at his watch, "I must be off. Good-bye, Jane ! Tell Ally I will do all I can for her, in hunting out a *suitable* duenna. *Au revoir !*"

The Viscount took his leave in a light tone, but he felt worried beyond measure ; and a vague idea of calling out Lord Ashley Ferrars on the following morning, more than once darted into his brain.

Were we to take the trouble of tracing out the source, whence Lady Jane and Mr.

Churchill heard the gossip concerning Lucy Leybourne and the young Guardsman, we doubt not it would be found to have sprung from some of my Lady Sarah's dear *clique*.

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"Lucy," said Lord Leybourne, as he and his young wife sat at breakfast next morning, "you had better accompany Blanche Devereux to Lady Elverland's to-night, as I shall not return from the Vandeleurs, until to-morrow."

"I thought, Walter, that you knew I had made up my mind to remain at home?"

"Remain at home, child—why?" exclaimed Leybourne, sharply.

"Because—" stammered poor Lucy, who had never heard a harsh tone from her husband before, and knew not what to make of it, "because—I do not wish to go to this masked-ball."

"Nonsense, dear! you must go," returned

the Viscount. "I have no wish to be laughed at; and laughed at we assuredly shall be, if I cannot go out of Town for a day or two, without your secluding yourself like a nun. Besides, if you stay at home, what is to become of poor Alicia?"

"But, I understood you last night, Walter, that Jane Churchill, for some reason or other, did not approve of Alicia's going with Blanche Devereux; and without Blanche I should not go under any consideration."

"Putting Alicia, then, entirely out of the question, Lucy," rejoined Lord Leybourne, hastily; "I must beg—nay, *desire*, that you do not send an excuse to Lady Elverland."

He rose from the table and consulted the time-piece.

"Just ten—no time for dawdling; so, good-bye, Lucy; be a good girl, and do as I ask you."

He kissed her as he spoke ; but Lucy fancied the caress was colder than usual.

“ Walter,” she said, as the tears rose and trembled on her soft eye-lashes, “ this will be the first day of separation since our marriage.”

“ Ah ! yes—so it will,” assented Leybourne, trying to assume an off-hand air, which the sight of those bright tears made a decided failure ; “ and, I suppose, it will not be the last—eh, Lucy ?”

“ Walter !”

The young Viscountess raised her beautiful, glistening eyes to her husband’s face, and, as she did so, the large tears trickled slowly down her cheek.

“ Lucy, my own, dearest, darling girl !” exclaimed Lord Leybourne, snatching her to his heart, as he saw these—the *first* — tears she had shed since he had called her wife ; “ forgive me—forgive my hasty temper—my—”

A sweet kiss literally stopped his mouth ;
and a sunny smile met his gaze.

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“How could I be such a fool as to doubt her?” thought Leybourne ; “not that I ever did doubt *her*, though. But what a confounded ass I must have been to allow myself to be played upon by that scandalous, old ‘tabby,’ Lady Sarah, and her brilliant satellites ! As for what Jane Churchill said — poor Jane ! Well, she is to be pitied, with such a husband as that honorable and pragmatical Cyprian of her’s ! Bless my own, sweet, little wife !—to think that *I* caused those tears !”

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Just as Lord Leybourne was stepping into his cab, an extremely dandified “tiger” swaggered up to the door of our Viscount’s house,

carrying in either hand a splendid *bouquet* and a guitar case.

Immediately Leybourne recognised his cousin's livery, and his self-tormenting spirit began once more to work within him.

"With Lord Ashley Ferrar's compliments to my Lady Leybourne," said the young Mercurius, handing in the *bouquet* and guitar-case to the Viscountess's footman.

A *strong* exclamation broke from between the lips of the aristocratic occupant of the cab, as he touched-up his pet mare with such unusual energy, that she started off so vehemently as almost to dethrone the small groom behind, and frighten an Italian organ-grinder into the heart of his fatherland.

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"Ah ! kinsman, is that you ?—good morning !" cried a merry voice ; "you are on the wing early to-day, like me."

The speaker, who had thus recalled Leybourne from the deepest depths of anything but a pleasing reverie, was in the first bloom of manhood—about twenty, tall, and well-made, but slight; with one of those bright, glad faces, which make the old long to be young again.

“Oh! good morning,” said Leybourne, as the other, who was in the full-dress uniform of the Guards, pulled up his horse beside the cab, “what’s in the wind—a review?”

“A review, my dear fellow?” repeated the young officer, “no, a Court-martial.”

“Pleasant!” exclaimed the Viscount, vacantly (as though he did not exactly know what to say or do), as he scanned the elegant and handsome cavalier from head to foot; and thought, in spite of himself—“What a deucedly good-looking fellow is my cousin Ashley Ferrars, third son of the Duke of Northaven.”

“At what time do you go to Elverland House to-night?” asked Leybourne, suddenly.

“I don’t think I shall go at all ; it depends on circumstances. *You* will be there?”

“No ; I am now on my way to Colonel Vandeleur’s.”

“Oh !” was Lord Ashley Ferrars’ brief response.

Walter Fitz-Walter, Viscount Leybourne, fixed his eyes on his cousin’s face, and beheld, or imagined he beheld, certain most tell-tale indications of the prickings of guilty conscience visible thereon.

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“There *must* be *something* in it !” soliloquised the Viscount, after parting from Lord Ashley Ferrars.

As he drove along, his brow gradually contracted more and more ; his eyes lost their wonted expression of generous trustfulness ; and, finally, he began to gnaw his nether lip,

as that very handsome nether-lip had never been gnawed before.

“I see it all—yes—I see it all! The flowers—the guitar—Lucy’s evident wish to remain at home to-night — Ashley’s altered determination, (for his sister Susan told me on Thursday, that he had accepted the invitation to Elverland House), and his embarrassed manner. I cannot yet bring myself to doubt my sweet Lucy’s intentions — but — Who would ever have supposed that that *shrimp*—that doll of a boy—would have grown into such a confoundedly handsome fellow in the space of a year or two?”

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“Lucy at home in Brook-street, *alone*! Ashley Ferrars gives up the *Bal Masque*—guitar sent this morning—they both sing deliciously—Ehem! capital opportunity for prac-

tising duetts ! By heaven ! I'll find out the truth or falsehood of these torturing doubts—or—”

The excited man drove straight to his Club, and thence despatched a note to Lucy, insisting on her not absenting herself from Lady Elverland's masquerade, on pain of his serious displeasure.

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It is strange, but passing-true, that the nobler the mind into which jealousy creeps, the more does it, for the time, disfigure it.

CHAPTER X.

Qu'un ami veritable est une bonne chose.

LA FONTAINE.

Disease creeps on with silent pace,
And withers every blooming grace.

Golden Legend.

“WHAT a number of characters !” exclaims my reader, “and, even now, towards the last act of this *Story of a Neighbourhood*, new ones have come crowding upon the stage. There is no end to them !”

Granted ; there is a great number of characters, but ours is a "Life-Drama;" and in real life, how vast is the crowd of people with whom we get mixed up, seemingly having nothing in the world to do with us, and yet, perhaps, almost imperceptibly influencing our words and actions in no slight degree.

Besides, in telling the *Story of a Neighbourhood*, we are compelled to say something about everybody, for fear of giving offence.

This much *en passant* !

We will now betake ourselves to a splendid house in Belgrave Square, at present occupied by the Marquis and Marchioness of Avonmere.

In the drawing-room we shall find the Marchioness and her friend, the Countess of Elverland, enjoying a long chat, without fear of interruption, as it is yet too early for fashionable morning-visitors.

"I was so delighted to get your note, dearest Clare, telling me that you would leave St.

Leonards for Town yesterday ; but sincerely do I grieve for the cause which hastened your coming hither ; for I well know how completely the Marquis is wrapped up in that poor child."

"I will tell you some day, Frederica—there would not be time this morning—the story of Ginevra's untimely fate ; and you will then understand William's devotion to this dear boy."

"If you were not an angel on earth, Clare, instead of an every-day step-mother, you would be jealous of Lord Avonmere's over-weening love for Vincenzo."

"But William dotes on our little George, Freddie ! I am not an angel ; but, nevertheless, not jealous."

"Thrice happy Clare ! I would I could say the same ! for, do you know, I believe Elverland is quite as fond of Claudia Vandeleur's little Horatia, as he is of our own small Maude ! *Apropos* of Claudia ! I wish you could

see the fuss the Colonel makes with that bewitching little creature and her daughter! One would think, to hear and see him, that a child had never been born into this world of sin before. Seven weeks has Claudia been confined, and Colonel Vandeleur still shuts himself up with her at Vale Court, refusing even to run up to Town for my much vituperated (as I hear it is in some quarters) but very brilliant *Bal Masqué*! and what is worse, he has seduced Lord Leybourne into going down to the Court to-day; so that, I fear, I shall not only lose the gallant Viscount, but also his beautiful Lucy, who seems determined not to go anywhere without her 'natural protector.' I wish the Marquis and you would come, Clare?"

"If any one could induce me to go to a ball at present, Frederica, it would be your own dear self," returned Lady Avonmere; "but whilst Vincenzo is so ill, I must not, of course,

think of it; add to which, William himself is far from well, although he will not allow it."

"Listen, Clare ! to-morrow night is Grisi's benefit—do you think Lord Avonmere might venture to the Opera ? I remember hearing him say that he has never heard Grisi ; and now there is an opportunity of his doing so, if he and you will accompany Elverland and myself to-morrow night ?"

"You shall ask him yourself, Frederica ; I expect he will be at home shortly."

"Poor Lady Amy De Lacey and her two children have been staying with you for some time at St. Leonards, have they not?" asked Lady Elverland.

"They were with us three weeks."

"And the poor baby, born under such heart-rending circumstances—does it thrive?"

"Strange to say, Frederica, my little God-child, Clare, is a perfect marvel of strength and

beauty. Were it not for her two darlings, Amy would not now be amongst the living. Since that dreadful morning at the Abbey, which I dare say you will never forget any more than myself, I have not seen a smile upon her face, though she never complains; but grief, I fear, is slowly, though surely, doing its fatal work within."

"Poor Amy!" murmured Lady Elverland, "how sadly has her first error been visited upon her!"

"It has indeed; and upon her father too, who cannot forgive himself for having so long held out against the dictates of his heart. Never did I behold anything more distressing than the Earl's agony, when he came to the Abbey, and found Amy, as we all thought, on her death-bed! He was truly 'the proud man stricken!'"

A pause ensued.

"And now, dearest Freddie," resumed Clare,

rousing herself from melancholy reflections,
“let me ask after your father—is he well?”

“Perfectly; but—”

“But what?”

“You must promise not to laugh too much when I tell you!”

“How mysteriously droll you look, Frederica!”

“And not without reason, Clare. Papa is going to give my little Maude a step-grand-mama!”

“*Really?*”

Lady Avonmere was thoroughly astonished, and the tone in which she uttered the word—“really,” proved it.

To think that little Sir Robert Shirley, the notoriously hen-pecked Sir Robert! should dare venture on a second matrimonial scheme!

“Yes—*really*, Clare!” continued the Countess, laughing; though, at the same time, she

looked half vexed ; “ but, remember ! what we are talking of now, is to be a profound secret for the present ; however, I could not refrain from telling *you*. To whom do you think the Oakstone Sultan’s handkerchief has been thrown ? ”

“ I have not the remotest idea—tell me.”

“ Cassandra Rokeby ! ”

“ Frederica—are you in earnest ? ”

“ Most seriously. Miss Cassandra is to become Lady Shirley during the Autumn ! ”

Clare certainly was most utterly amazed.

A “ Rokeby of Rokeby ” going to marry Sir Robert Shirley !

“ I know what is in your mind, sister mine ! ” exclaimed Frederica, “ as well as if I were Marchioness of Avonmere, instead of Countess of Elverland. You are wondering how in the world papa got over the Rokeby-pride ! and *I* have never ceased to do so, since he announced to me, that he had proposed and been accepted. Claudia Vandeleur writes me word, that Sir

Ranulph and Miss Etheldreda maintain a strict reserve on the subject, but that papa is a daily visitor at Rokeby Place, and was mentioned, at a public-meeting the other day at Limehurst, by the stately Baronet, as his ‘excellent and much respected friend and neighbour !’ Cupid’s doings are, *sans doute*, most marvellous doings !”

“And how do Miss Sacharissa and Sir Samuel Culpepper go on ?”

“Very much as usual—a complete case of Capulet and Montague—but poor Sir Samuel gets the worst of it, and is continually driven from home for weeks together, in consequence of the Amazonian Sacharissa’s hostilities.”

“And the Wileys ?”

“The same as ever—scandalous and unbearable. That horrid Mrs. Dionysius had the impertinence to write me a congratulatory epistle on the birth of my little Maude !”

The nurse now came in, with the diminutive Lord George-William Pierrepont in her arms,

arrayed in his most becoming robe and cockade, for the inspection of his mama's friend.

"How like the Marquis?" was Frederica's exclamation, followed by a perfect storm of kisses and complimentary outbursts as to the beauty of the little gentleman's blue eyes, white skin, lovely mouth, rounded shoulders, &c., &c., &c., to all of which, the ungrateful mite of a lordling seemed to turn a very indifferent and impatient ear, holding out his arms importunately towards Clare.

At this crisis Lord Avonmere made his appearance, and greeted the Countess with his usual gentle cordiality.

Frederica was struck with the increased brightness of his eye, the pallor of his cheek, and an air of languor that accompanied his every movement; and wondered if Clare had observed the same.

"Who do you think has returned to England, Clare?" asked the Marquis.

Clare and Frederica involuntarily exchanged a hasty glance.

“ Could it be Noel Vernon ? ” each asked herself.

“ Not Algernon De Lacey, William ? ”

“ The villain ! No—a very different person—Lord Vernondale ! He arrived unexpectedly last night.”

“ How delighted will aunt Eleanor and Gertie be, when they return from Lady Anne’s this afternoon ! Did you see Vernondale yourself, William ? ”

“ Yes ; I met him on his way to Mrs. Lorton Devereux’s, with whom he is coming to see you after luncheon. He is looking the picture of health.”

Frederica now brought the Opera-scheme upon the *tapis*, to which the Marquis gave a ready assent, provided Vincenzo continued better.

“ At last, then,” exclaimed Lady Elverland, “ I shall see my Clare’s soft light putting out

the more glaring lustre of the acknowledged stars of fashion ! Thank you, Lord Avonmere, for this beginning. Do you know, when I heard it was necessary for you to take Vincenzo to the seaside, instead of making your appearance in town this season, I began quite to despair of ever seeing the Marquis and Marchioness of Avonmere amongst us ! And now, good-bye ! until to-morrow."

CHAPTER XI.

And there are dresses splendid, but fantastical,
Masks of all times and nations, Turks and Jews,
And harlequins and clowns, with feats gymnastical,
Greeks, Romans, Yankee-doodles, and Hindoos.

BEppo.

POOR Lucy shed innumerable tears on receiving Leybourne's note, but finding she had no longer the shadow of a choice concerning the masquerade, wrote to tell Mrs. Lorton Devereux she was going, and also sent a line to Lady Jane Churchill, offering to *chaperone* Alicia.

This being done, she drove off to her milliner's to say that the Illyrian costume (one of her husband's choosing), which she had counter-ordered the day before, must now be forthcoming on the morrow.

On returning home she found a note from the Countess of Stalsfield, written from the Churchills', stating that in consequence of a second urgent invitation from Lady Elverland, she had been induced by Idonia and Mary to bring them to town for the *Bal Masquè*, and that, therefore, Alicia need not now tax Lucy's kindness.

"Mary?" exclaimed the Viscountess to herself, with a bright smile, "how very glad I am!"

There is certainly something very mysterious about you, Lucy! Why should you be so particularly charmed at the idea of Lady Mary Fitz-Walter's being at the ball? She was only presented the other day, and carried back to Calverley Castle immediately afterwards, in consequence of her mother's health being still

too delicate to allow of London gaieties. You scarcely know Lady Mary, Lucy ! I fear you are, after all, a designing, manœuvring young creature !

Mais, nous verrons !

* * * * *

“ Who was right, *Lucie*, *ma belle*—you or I ?” said Mrs. Lorton Devereux, as she and Lady Leybourne were flying along the road to Elverland House near Richmond, “ did I not say your old-fashioned prudery would melt away, like morning-dew, before *the* night arrived ?”

Lucy sighed, and wished herself back in her own snug little *boudoir*. She was sadly out of spirits. Time presses, dear reader, and space contracts, so we must not loiter by the way ; but at once plunge “in *medias res*”—*i.e.*, into the midst of

“ The gay and festive scene,”

at Elverland House.

At the time we make our appearance there, some of the "guests in motley" are ascending the stairs to the supper-room, whilst others are wandering about the splendidly-illuminated gardens, enjoying the cooling but unquestionably dangerous luxury of midnight breezes.

"Blanche!" said the Viscountess to Mrs. Lorton Devereux, as they stood together in a conservatory adjoining the ball-room, "there is a 'Grey Domino' here, who has continually haunted my steps since we arrived. I cannot make out who he can be! Wherever I turn my eyes, there he is."

"Do you see him now, my modern Clarissa Harlowe?"

"No, Blanche—supper be thanked!—he is invisible for the time being. By-the-bye, have you any idea who the Albanian Chief may be, with whom I have seen you dancing three or four times?"

"An old friend of mine, dear," replied Mrs.

Devereux, hastily ; and then immediately changing the subject, she continued—

“ Touching your Grey Domino, Lucy ; I imagine there is but little ingenuity required to guess whose handsome young face——”

“ Blanche !” cried Lady Leybourne, with some little agitation, “ you do not mean——”

“ Yes, Lucy, but I do,”

“ Whom ?”

“ Ashley Ferrars,” whispered the widow.

“ Ridiculous ! my dear Blanche. Lord Ashley told me at Covent Garden last night, he could not possibly be here, because——”

“ He thought our lovely Viscountess would not make one of the masquers !” interrupted Mrs. Lorton Devereux, laughing, “ *that* mystery is soon cleared up, Lucy !”

“ Nay, dearest Blanche——” began Lady Leybourne.

“ Yea, dearest coz, but it is so,” interrupted Blanche, playfully, “ Ashley Ferrars has by some means found out that you had changed

your mind, or some one had changed it for you ; therefore, puzzle yourself no longer, as to the identity of '*le Domino Gris*.' Depend upon it, it is no other than your devoted young Guardsman !"

"Don't laugh, Blanche !" entreated Lucy, whose voice betrayed real distress, "had I dreamed that Lord Ashley Ferrars would be here to-night, not even Walter should have persuaded me to come to this hateful *Bal Masqué* unaccompanied by himself."

"My dear, darling child !" exclaimed Mrs. Lorton Devereux, "what a fuss you are making about nothing !—such a boy as Ashley Ferrars is !"

"Blanche—you do not know all !"

"All what, Lucy ?"

"I will tell you," replied Lady Leybourne, seriously, "and then you will understand why I am so uneasy to-night. You must know that, shortly before I called for you this evening, the postman brought me a letter directed

to me in an unknown hand, the sole contents of which were—

“ ‘If Lady Leybourne has any regard for her fair name, she will beware of the attentions of Lord A—y F—s.’

“There was no signature or address, but the envelope bore the London post-mark. You cannot tell, dear Blanche, how much this anonymous [communication has annoyed and agitated me.”

“Treat it with the most sovereign contempt, dearest !” exclaimed Mrs. Lorton Devereux, indignantly ; “but you have not destroyed this precious manuscript, Lucy ?”

“No ; I put it into my desk.”

“That’s well. You will let me see it to-morrow, and perhaps I may be able to tell you to whom you are indebted for this friendly warning. Meanwhile, Lucy, do not worry your dear little self. Letter and writer are

both beneath contempt. Ah ! here comes my mysterious Albanian ; I will introduce him to you."

At this moment, the masquer, whom Lucy had observed dancing with Blanche several times, entered the conservatory, and at once advanced to the two friends.

"Lord Vernondale," said Mrs. Devereux, "let me present to you my very dear cousin, Lady Leybourne."

"This is not the first time I have had the pleasure of meeting Lady Leybourne," remarked Lord Vernondale, removing his mask ; "I have still a vivid recollection of a small fairy, called Lucy Graham, who used to patronize me when I was a dull, sickly boy, staying at the Warren, some twelve years ago."

"I remember it perfectly," said Lucy, frankly offering her hand, "and must now beg to congratulate you on having lost all resemblance to the 'dull and sickly boy' of former

days. But I ~~was~~ not aware that you were in England, Lord Vernondale ?”

“I only returned yesterday.”

“Are Lady Vernondale and your sister here ?”

“Yes ; they brought me under their wings, at the especial desire of a fair *signora*—”

“Hush !” exclaimed Mrs. Lorton Devereux, putting her feather-fan before his mouth, with a familiarity which rather astonished Lucy, who began to wonder how it was that Blanche had not mentioned anything about Lord Vernondale during the evening, “you came to please yourself, and no one else. But, tell me, have you yet been into the supper-room ?”

“A perfect impossibility at present, Mrs. Devereux ; so, what say you and Lady Leybourne to a turn in the gardens for a few minutes ?”

“A refreshing suggestion,” returned Blanche, “the heat is intense. But are you afraid to venture, Lucy ?”

“Not in the least; I should enjoy a little fresh air, exceedingly.”

Lord Vernondale, offering an arm to each of the ladies, they proceeded towards the garden.

“My *bouquet*,” suddenly exclaimed Lucy, as they were descending a flight of steps leading to the lawn, at the back of the mansion; “I have left it in the conservatory.”

“Let me go in search of it, Lady Leybourne?”

“No, thank you, Lord Vernondale; if you and Blanche will wait for me under the colonnade yonder, I will be with you again immediately.”

And, without time for another word, she swiftly re-ascended the steps, and returned to the conservatory.

The *bouquet* was not where she had left it.

“Is Lady Leybourne looking for her flowers?” asked a low voice, behind her.

Lucy started, and turning round, beheld the "Grey Domino," with the missing *bouquet* in his hand.

He evidently knew her, in spite of her mask.

"It must be Ashley Ferrars," she said to herself; "for Blanche mentioned that she had told him, and *only* him, what costume I was to wear."

She tremblingly held out her hand for the flowers.

Lucy Leybourne had never felt in the least alarmed at the attentions of her husband's handsome young cousin, before the arrival of the anonymous letter; but now she could not subdue the misgivings that rushed into her mind. Lucy had had reasons of her own for not attempting to discourage the intimacy existing between Ashley Ferrars and herself; but the thought that, perhaps, her inexperience and credulity might have deceived her as

to his real intentions. That the pretence upon which their confidential familiarity was based, might be false.

Lucy had heard and read of such things ; and, for once, suspicion took possession of her guileless mind.

“ You prize these flowers, then, Lady Leybourne ? ” said the ‘ Grey Domino,’ in the same low, impressive voice—almost a whisper.

“ They are very beautiful,” returned Lucy, coldly, and striving not to betray any emotion.

“ Were they less beautiful in themselves, would they be less valuable ? ”

“ Certainly not. Every gift from my husband would be equally prized by me.”

“ This *bouquet*, then, was *his* gift ? ” said the ‘ Grey Domino,’ in a tone of disappointment ; “ I had fondly flattered myself—”

He paused, and Lucy no longer had the slightest doubt but that it was Lord Ashley Ferrars who was speaking. The flowers *he* had sent her, she had left at home.

Dearest Lucy !" exclaimed the Domino, but without for an instant forgetting the cautious tone in which he had first addressed her, and clasping the hand she again extended for her *bouquet*."

"Lord Ashley Ferrars! I did not expect this from you !"

"Not after all your kind encouragement, Lucy ?"

"I do not understand you, sir !" cried the Viscountess, trying to disengage her hand.

"Lucy—my own Lucy !"

"Lord Ashley !" cried Lady Leybourne, who, in the agitation of the moment, did not observe the altered voice in which these last words were uttered, "how can you dare thus to insult me ?—you, who, under false pretences have meanly thrust yourself upon me, and now, in the absence of my husband——"

"Lucy !" exclaimed the "Grey Domino," once more, in impassioned accents, as he threw

his arm around her waist, and drew her towards him.

* * * * *

“What can detain Lucy so long?” said Mrs. Lorton Devereux, as she and Lord Vernondale slowly paced, arm in arm, under the colonnade, “let us go and look for her?”

“*Has* she been absent long?” returned Vernondale, casting on the fair widow a very lovingly-eloquent glance.

Blanche did not reply, but smiled brightly as she nodded her head affectionately.

When they reached the conservatory, a startling *tableau* met their view.

Lucy was sitting on a rustic chair, pale and tearful, her head leaning against the breast of a “Grey Domino,” who stooped over her in an attitude of anxious tenderness; whilst Lady Mary Fitz-Walter, unmasked, stood on one

side of the invalid, with a smelling-bottle in her hand; and on the other, a second edition of the "Grey Domino," holding a glass of water, and displaying the handsome face of Ashley Ferrars. Lady Elverland and several others of her guests were grouped around the principal figures in the picture.

"Good gracious Lady Elverland!" exclaimed Blanche, hastily entering the conservatory, "what has happened?"

"Don't be alarmed, Mrs. Devereux," answered Frederica, "poor Lucy has been rather faint and hysterical; that is all. Do you feel better now, Lucy?"

"Oh! yes, thank you, Frederica; but, pray, do not let me detain you longer from your guests."

Lady Elverland then withdrew, taking with her a numerous band of indifferent persons, who, with officious, but good-natured attentions, did what they could to keep from poor Lucy the little air there was.

“ *Two* ‘Grew Dominos!’ ” cried Blanche, rather mystified, “you are one, Ashley ; but—what *is* the meaning of this most effective scene ?”

“ All I know,” replied Ferrars, “ is this. I was detained in town so late that I have only been here half an hour, and after a waltz with Mary, was taking her into supper, when, just as we were passing the conservatory, I heard some one calling for water, and seeing Lady Leybourne fainting in the arms of my *double*, I left Mary with them, and flew off for the water. When I returned, I found that Lady Elverland and half a regiment more, had come upon the stage. So much for my evidence, Blanche !”

“ But who can the other , Grey ’ man be ?” asked Mrs. Lorton Devereux, in a low aside.

“ I have not the ghost of a notion,” answered Ferrars, “ unless he is my *fecth*.”

“ Why, my dear child,” said Blanche, now going up to Lady Leybourne, and taking her

hand, "what put it into your head to faint?"

"Don't ask any questions just now, Blanche," said the "Grey Domino," who was *not* Ashley Ferrars, in a tone of deep feeling, "all shall be explained by-and-by."

"Leybourne!—is it possible?" cried the widow, more astonished than ever, "what mystery is this? Mary, do *you* know what these good folks have been about?"

"You shall hear all to-morrow, Blanche," said Leybourne, who seemed very decidedly ill at ease, "do you still wish to go home, dear Lucy?"

"I think I had better," returned the Viscountess, smiling faintly, "perhaps Lord Vernondale would kindly order the carriage?—and do you, Mary, go with Lord Ashley, and join the dancers again. I am so sorry to have been the cause of detaining you thus long."

Lady Mary affectionately kissed her sister-

in-law, and lost no time in following her advice.

Meanwhile Lord Vernondale had gone to desire that Lady Leybourne's carriage might be brought round as soon as possible, and Mrs. Devereux, left alone with her cousins, once more asked for a solution of the mystery.

The Viscount made a stammering attempt at an explanation, perceiving which, Lucy came to his relief.

"You see, Blanche, Walter changed his intention of going to Vale Court to-day, and—and thought he would play me a little trick so he came down here, and——"

"Very absurd of Walter, too—begging his pardon!" interrupted Mrs. Lortou Devereux, "I suppose, Lucy, you owe your present pale face to your playful husband's love of a joke—is it not so?"

"It was very weak and foolish of me," continued Lady Leybourne, not at all relishing

the tone Blanche had assumed in speaking of her Walter's proceedings, "but when I discovered who the "Grey Domino" really was, I was so taken by surprise, that I—I—"

"Fainted!" cried Blanche, sharply; "do you know, Leybourne, I never felt so inclined to quarrel with you, as I do at this moment!"

And the young widow's looks did not belie her words. Having known Lord Leybourne from childhood, she had more than once before observed a strong tendency to jealousy in his otherwise fine, noble disposition; and she now clearly saw why he had chosen the same disguise as Ashley Ferrars, and all the rest of it, with no slight degree of indignation and anger.

The Viscount did not attempt a syllable in his own defence, but stood, pale and silent, still supporting Lucy, and feeling more dejected and abashed than he had ever done in his life—and certainly not without cause.

Lord Vernondale now returned, and an-

nounced that the carriage would be ready in a few minutes.

"I suppose, you do not feel inclined to leave just yet, Blanche?" said Lucy, rising from her seat.

"Of course not," interposed Vernondale, eagerly.

"But Lady Leybourne brought me in her carriage," began Mrs. Lorton Devereux.

"And my mother will be only too happy to take you back in her's," was the reply, "that difficulty is soon overcome."

The quartette now shook hands, and Leybourne contrived to say something polite to Vernondale, as to the pleasure it gave him to see the *ci-dévant* invalid once more in England, and looking so well.

"Will you make our apologies to Lady Elverland, Blanche?" said Lucy, taking her husband's arm, "and tell Lady Stalsfield and the girls we shall be with them before they leave Town to-morrow."

“I will, dear,” answered Mrs. Lorton Devereux; and kissing Lucy’s cheek, she whispered—“Congratulate me—Vernondale has proposed, and I have accepted him !”

Lady Leybourne started.

This then accounted for the ill-success of some half-hundred unfortunates, who had offered themselves for the acceptance of the captivating widow !

Nor was Lucy the only person who was amazed, when the matter became publicly known—so well had Blanche kept her own counsel.

“Be with us to-morrow at luncheon, Blanche, quite alone,” whispered Lord Leybourne, as “good-nights” were once more exchanged, “I wish to make you my confessor.”

“I will. Good-night !”

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When Lucy found herself alone with her husband in the carriage, she could no longer restrain her emotion, but, bursting into tears, leaned her head upon his shoulder, and wept unrestrainedly.

“Forgive me, Lucy—my best and dearest wife!” murmured Lord Leybourne, in accents of the deepest remorse, as he clasped her close to his breast, “can you forgive my mad folly, Lucy?”

“Oh! Walter! and did you, for a moment, really doubt me?”

“You cannot then speak the word of forgiveness?”

“From my soul, I can, my dearest husband!”

“Bless you! my noble, generous girl!” exclaimed Lord Leybourne, in a broken voice, “to think that I should have lent myself to such shameful meanness—that I should have been madman enough to suspect you of dupli-

city—nay, worse ! Lucy ! you can never again love and respect me as you have done ?”

“Time will show,” returned the young wife, in accents thrilling with affection, as she crept closer and closer to the beating heart beside her.

A long and delicious silence succeeded ; but, at last, poor Leybourne’s reflections again assumed an unpleasant shade.

“Should this affair become known,” he exclaimed, “I shall be the laughing-stock of the whole town—not but what I fully deserve it—and how shall I then dare show my face amongst—”

“Who need know anything about it, dearest Walter, except Blanche Devereux and our two selves ? besides, it was but a jest—”

“Played but too successfully !” interrupted Leybourne, impetuously, “what an idiot I have been ! Then, Lady Elverland, Lucy !

what must she have thought—what must she have thought, on seeing me, when you had told her that I was at Vandeleur's ?”

“ Only that you had changed your mind, Walter.”

“ But your sudden illness, love—”

“ There is nothing new or astonishing in a lady fainting at a ball, dear Leybourne. Do not distress yourself needlessly. Rely upon it, no one will ever guess at the truth.”

“ Heaven grant they may not, Lucy !”

CHAPTER XII.

Lady Bridget—Come, Mistress Marley, prythee, now, the news—

I'll warrant me thou'st brought a budget !

Widow Marley—Aye, have I, volumes, noble gossip mine.

THE COURTIER'S DAUGHTER.

IN Lady Sarah Fitz-Walter's drawing-room, in Dover Street, were met certain members of the "Scandal Club." There was the Lady Sarah herself; little, waspish Mrs. Dundas; great, heavy, sententious Jacobina McBean; Mrs. Wynne; her two sisters, the Misses Selina and Kitty Sidebotham; and last, but not least, the

redoubted and infallible Lady Conolly, backed by her "toady," Miss Browning.

Much interesting and edifying matter is being discussed amongst these worthy maids, and respectable widows.

"You don't mean to tell me, my dear Lady Conolly," exclaimed Mrs. Dundas, raising her hands in virtuous horror, "that Lady Leybourne was actually reclining her head on Lord Ashley Ferrars' shoulder, when her husband surprised them in the conservatory?"

"Ab-so-lutely the case, I can assure you," replied Lady Conolly, "Miss O'Gorman is my authority—aint she, Brownie?"

"Unquestionably, madam," returned Toady, solemnly.

"Poor, dear Lord Leybourne!" ejaculated Miss Selina Sidebotham, lifting her eyes to the ceiling.

"But what could you expect from a young woman who has Anson-blood in her veins?" added Miss Kitty; "you, doubtless, remember,

ladies, that shameful affair of Major Anson's with Lady Frances Trewman ?”

“ And then, you know,” super-added Widow Wynne, “ there is but little doubt that Lady Leybourne's grand aunt, Lucy Anson, lived a whole twelvemonth on the Continent with Mr. Mortimer, before he married her !”

“ Ah-h-h !” groaned Lady Conolly, shaking her head, with lugubrious deliberation, “ I can't say I like the Anson-set at all, at all ! How could your unfortunate and misguided nephew have formed such an alliance, my dear Lady Sarah ?”

“ The girl is pretty,” replied Lady Sarah, “ and as artful as you might expect a grand-niece of Mrs. Mortimer's would be.”

“ I trust,” said Miss Selina Sidebotham, with sweet consideration, “ that this subject is not too trying to your ladyship's feelings, as so near a connexion of the erring Viscountess ?”

“ By no means,” replied Lady Sarah, whose

benign smile, showed how complete was her enjoyment, "I never could endure the girl from the first moment I saw her!"

"Her mother was a Raymond—was she not?" asked Lady Conolly, who knew well enough all about it.

"Yes; a daughter of the Dean of Manbury."

"Worse and worse!" exclaimed Selina Sidebotham, "ah! Lady Sarah, my sisters and I *could* tell you *such* things of those Raymonds—"

"Don't soil your lips by mentioning them," interrupted Widow Wynne, "their bad-doings are not fit to be talked about by reputable people."

"You are quite right, Penelope," rejoined Miss Selina, "they are not, indeed—at least, in the hearing of a girl, like Kitty."

Miss Kitty immediately assumed her most juvenile air.

"Eh! but ye're leadin' awa the threed o'

my Leddy Conolly's tale about my Leddy Leybourne," interposed Jackey McBean.

"And so we were," said Miss Selina, nodding approvingly to the Scottish lassie, "pray, proceed, dear Lady Conolly. You had just mentioned that Miss O'Gorman was your authority."

"She was—wasn't she, Brownie?"

"Assuredly, madam," answered Miss Browning, "but she did *not* asseverate, that she witnessed with her own (Miss O'Gorman's) eyes the flagitious spectacle your ladyship has made mention of, as having presented itself in the conservatory appertaining to the Earl of Elverland's residence."

"Oh, she did n't—did n't she, Brownie?"

"Indubitably not, madam."

"How was it, then, Brownie?"

"Miss O'Gorman, madam—as I understand—obtained the startling information from her (Miss O'Gorman's) own maid, who stands in the relationship of step-sister to Lady Martha

Foljambe's housekeeper; and Lady Martha's brother's most intimate friend was one of the invited guests at Elverland House."

"Exactly, Brownie; correct as usual," cried Lady Conolly, feeling justly proud of the inestimable treasure she possessed in such a memory-keeper as Miss Browning, "so, you see, my dear friends, there no longer exists a doubt, as to the authenticity of this shameful story."

"Certainly not," acquiesced little Mrs. Dundas, waving her plumed head, "there can be no question about it."

"An' was that daft, feckless jillet o'a body, Meestress Lorton Devereux, by, when my Leddy Leybourne forgot hersel'?"

"I can't say, Miss Mc'Bean," replied Lady Conolly, "Miss O'Gorman did n't mention anything about Mrs. Devereux's being present at the exposure—did she, Brownie?"

"She did *not*, madam," answered the Toady,

“but she (Miss O’Gorman) *did* say, that Mrs. Lorton Devereux was seen to walk out, alone, with Viscount Leybourne, into the gardens, leaving the Viscountess in the conservatory with Lord Ashley Ferrars.”

“Ah !” groaned Widow Wynne,” Lord Leybourne, and Mrs. Devereux are cousins ; and mischief between cousins is, we are all well aware, quite proverbial !”

The conclave shook its head dismally.

“But, how was it ?” asked Miss Kitty Sidebotham, “did the unhappy young Viscountess leave Elverland House, immediately on the discovery of her disgrace ?”

“To be sure she did,” responded Lady Conolly, “didn’t she, Brownie ?”

“Her guilty ladyship *did*, madam.”

“With Lord Ashley ?” enquired Miss Kitty.

“Kitty !” exclaimed Selina, looking shocked at the plainness of her juvenile sister’s query, “how can you ?”

“Not with Lord Ashley Ferrars, madam—with the Viscount,” replied Miss Browning.

“Of course, she will be removed from her injured husband’s house to-day?” questioned Mrs. Dundas.

“I should certainly suppose so,” returned Lady Conolly, “Miss O’Gorman said so—did n’t she Brownie?”

“Miss O’Gorman did not venture a surmise on that subject, madam.”

“Are you sure, Brownie?”

The Toady bowed.

“Quite sure, Brownie?”

“Perfectly, madam.”

“How deeply is Lord Leybourne to be condoled with!” sighed Miss Selina Sidebotham, who was rather of the sentimental order of gossips—where men were concerned!

“What! sister!” ejaculated the savagely-virtuous Widow Wynne, “condole with him, when you know that he was seen alone in the garden with Mrs. Lorton Devereux? Fie!

fie ! Selina ! For my part, I have no doubt in the world, but that Lord Leybourne had his eye to *damages*, when he left his wife with young Ferrars in the conservatory."

Lady Sarah Fitz-Walter, who, for some time, had sat a silent, but well-pleased, listener to what was going on, suddenly looked as black as thunder, on hearing the widow's last words.

"Ehem ! You forget, Mrs. Wynne, that Lord Leybourne is my nephew, and a Fitz-Walter, or you surely would not have thought it possible that he could, for an instant, connive at his wife's disgrace, for the sake of 'filthy lucre !' "

Widow Wynne was thus most unexpectedly "shut up," and looked far from comfortable, under the rebuff she had just met with.

"Well, well," said Lady Conolly, with edifying solemnity of voice and manner, "I trust that the disgrace of this misguided young creature may prove a wholesome warning to us

all! And, now, my dear Lady Sarah, before I bid you 'good-day,' I must express a hope that our discussion has not been too much for you."

"Not at all! not at all!" replied Lady Sarah, in accents of real enjoyment, "the affair serves my nephew perfectly right. Why did n't he marry Giles Wilson's daughter, as I wished him to do? A rich brewer is far better than a poor clergyman, I am sure! Why, Miss Wilson will be worth nine hundred thousand pounds at the old man's death!"

Mrs. Wynne muttered something to her sister Selina, about "filthy lucre," and then, with the Misses Sidebotham, took leave of the temple of Scandal.

Lady Conolly and "Brownie," speedily followed.

When the others were gone, Lady Sarah begged Mrs. Dundas and her Scotch cousin to drive with her as far as Brook Street, in the

hope of discovering fresh food for their next intellectual banquet.

“ If *I should* be admitted,” said Lady Sarah, “ you, and Miss Mc Bean, will be good enough to wait for me in the carriage, my dear Mrs. Dundas.”

The plumes swayed in approval of the arrangement.

CHAPTER XIII.

Bassanio.—And true she is, as she hath proved herself.

Merchant of Venice.

Qu'il est doux d'être belle alors qu'on est aimée.

Delphine Gay.

Lady Bridget.—Depend upon't, this matter's but hush'd
up,
'To stay the tongues of justly-scandal'd
folk.

Courtier's Daughter.

“MY dear coz,” said Lord Leybourne, who sat
in his wife’s *boudoir*, between Lucy and Mrs.
Lorton Devereux, his arm closely encircling

the former, "let me first congratulate you (sly puss that you are !) on what this little woman has told me, respecting yourself and Vernondale ; and, secondly, let me thank you for thus promptly keeping your tryst with me this morning. I need not, of course, after what you witnessed last night at Elverland House, tell you why I so particularly requested your presence at this early hour?"

"I suppose, Walter," replied Blanche, "you felt that you deserved condign punishment for having allowed the yellow fiend to get possession of you, and thereby terrify this darling child into fits ; and that, in a paroxysm of penitent self-abasement, you determined to place yourself beneath the well-known scourge of my tongue?"

"Something of the sort," returned the Viscount, trying not to look ashamed of himself, "and now, Blanche, grant me a patient hearing, and be as indignant with me as you please afterwards."

Lord Leybourne then frankly explained to Mrs. Lorton Devereux all that the reader is already acquainted with, respecting the absurd doubts which had got possession of his brain, concerning the intimacy of Lucy with Ashley Ferrars, to which his visit to his sister, Jane Churchill, after the spiteful hints of Lady Sarah and her two pleasing friends, had added not a little force. Then, the guitar and *bouquet* on the following morning, when he was starting for Vale Court, followed immediately by his *rencontre* with his handsome cousin, in whose countenance and manner, the jealous Viscount imagined he discovered evident signs of agitation and confused consciousness of guilt, etc.

“In fact, Blanche, I have proved myself a hot-headed idiot; and Lucy—”

“Ten thousand times too good for such a jealous-pate!” interrupted Mrs. Lorton Devereux.

“Exactly! That hateful part I played in

the conservatory, will haunt me to my dying day! To think that there should be such a besotted fool, under Heaven's face, as Walter Fitz-Walter showed himself last night! while this angel—"

"Walter! Walter!" cried Lucy, throwing her arms round her husband's neck, "do not speak so! I could bear anything, (next to your doubting my faith,) rather than hear you disparage your own noble, affectionate disposition. Indeed, indeed, you are my all of excellence!"

Leybourne could not reply. He pressed her to his heart, and inwardly swore to mistrust his own honor, ere he would again, in ever so slight a degree, doubt his Lucy's devotedness and truth.

"Positively," said Blanche Devereux, as a tear trickled down her smiling face, "you two silly folks are sadly disturbing my usual stoicism. Please do not go on in this touching way, or you will send me into hysterics!"

Walter !” she continued, and her voice took a serious tone in spite of herself, “ I must own, that last night, or rather, at half-past four this morning, I did not go to sleep, ‘ at peace with all mankind,’ for I felt a most weighty degree of anger against yourself. Now, however, your candid confession has banished all ill-feelings. God grant that you may never more be led to misjudge this dear—this ‘ peerless pearl of wifeness !’ Remember, Walter ! she is your’s now, and for ever—to love and to cherish—”

Blanche could not utter another word ; her warm heart was full to overflowing, and she hid her face in her handkerchief.

“ Blanche ! dearest Blanche !” said Lucy, getting up and tenderly kissing her, “ do not cry ! Walter and I shall never be unhappy again. It will not do for you to dim those bright eyes with tears *now* ; or what will Lord Vernondale say ?”

Mrs. Lorton Devereux smiled through her tears.

“That’s right, Blanche !” exclaimed Leybourne, affectionately pressing the young widow’s hand, “‘smile again, my bonnie lassie ! Lassie, smile again !’ You were ever a wise little monitress to me, and you shall now find that your words of advice have not been thrown away. Vernondale, you say, will join us at luncheon ? I shall rejoice to shake him by the hand, and tell him how well I think he deserves the love of the generous, kindly heart, which beats beneath this bewitching dark-green riding-habit. And now for the remainder of our explanation.”

“Let me tell it, Walter ?” said his wife, “as *I* have, in my turn, to make a confession. Blanche ! I am obliged to plead guilty to the charge of having been excessively intimate with Lord Ashley Ferrars, and of our mutually agreeing to keep a secret from my husband.”

“A very pretty beginning, truly !” exclaimed Blanche.

“Yes,” continued Lucy, “ever since my first fortnight in town, I have acted as *confidante* to Lord Ashley. We have had a secret between us, which circumstances obliged me to disclose to Walter last night ; and now, I am about to confide it to you, Blanche—but you must not even tell it to Lord Vernondale. Ashley Ferrars took it into his head to fall in love with Mary Fitz-Walter, when he was at Calverley last Christmas, and Mary thought proper to return the compliment—”

“In love ?—such children ?” cried Blanche ; forgetting that she herself was a married woman before she arrived at Lady Mary’s present age.

“Even so,” resumed Lucy, “and what is more, Ashley, one day, ventured to hint at the state of affairs to Lord Stalsfield, who, cut to the heart at the time, on poor dear Amy’s account, angrily desired he might never hear

more of such childish folly ; and so, the young lovers were, of course, very miserable, and before Ashley left the Castle, Mary and he had vowed to remain constant to each other, even 'to the crack of doom.' This was the secret which my 'devoted Guardsman,' as you called him last night, confided to me on an occasion when we were practising duetts *tete-à-tete*, and which has given rise to the intimacy which—"

"Set our dear Aunt Sarah's tongue on the move," interrupted Lord Leybourne, "and caused me to make such an egregious idiot of myself!"

"*Much ado about Nothing*," and "*All's Well that Ends Well*!" laughed Mrs. Lorton Devereux, "but, really, Lucy, I fear you are not quite to be trusted after all—encouraging the rising-generation in disobedience to parental authority?"

"But, indeed, Blanche," returned the Viscountess, looking as grave as a pretty little judge,

(if there be such an animal. “I am sure I gave Lord Ashley the best advice I could—for he would not let me tell Walter any thing about it—and persuaded him to destroy a letter he had written to Mary, which he wanted me to enclose in an envelope from myself. But I must own, I was greatly delighted when I heard that Lady Stalsfield had made up her mind to bring Idonia and Mary to the *bal masqué*. I cannot help feeling interest in all love affairs, and, especially, when I am so fond of the actors in them, as I am of Ashley Ferrars and Mary Fitz-Walter. I only hope the poor things enjoyed their ball—”

“More than you did, darling, eh?” exclaimed Lord Leyburne.

Before the subject of the masquerade was dismissed, Blanche begged for a solution of the mystery attendant on the appearance of *two* ‘Grey Dominos’ in the conservatory *tableau*; which was rather awkwardly given by the Viscount, who, it seems, had, by means of a

golden portrait of her Majesty, found out from Ashley Ferrars' servant, the habit he intended to assume, and ordered one for himself of the same description.

"That was the dirtiest part of the whole disgusting affair—that tampering with a valet, although I did throw dust into his eyes, as to the real cause of my curiosity," said Lord Leybourne, "but enough of this, let us try to forget the thing entirely, and 'live happily ever after,' as the story-books say. And, now, Lucy, darling ! take Blanche up stairs to bathe those eyes of hers, whilst you get on your habit, and I order the horses. By the time you are robed, I dare say Vernondale will be here, and luncheon ready."

* * * * *

Just as Mrs. Lorton Devereux, Lord and Lady Leybourne, and Lord Vernondale were rising from the table, and the horses were

being brought round to the door, Lady Sarah Fitz-Walter's "Clarence" drove up, containing herself, Mrs. Dundas, and that "sonsie kimmer," Jacobina Mc Bean.

"More inquiries after your ladyship's health !" said Mrs. Lorton Devereux ; "I wonder how many times that poor door has been battered to-day, in consequence of your last night's indisposition ? Adams and Thomas will surely give warning on the strength of this morning's fatigues !"

"Is Lady Leybourne at home ?" asked Lady Sarah, pulling a fearfully long face, as she thrust her head out of the carriage-window, on the appearance of Adams.

"She is, my lady."

The three scandal-mongers looked at one another in blank amazement. They were completely discomfited, having fully expected to see "*divorce*," or, at least, "*separate maintenance*," written in the countenance of the

footman. But, no ! Adams, ever a cheerful flunkey, looked, to-day, even more cheerful than usual. What could Adams mean by looking so cheerful ?

The three bonnets within the carriage suddenly came into confidential contact, and a whispering ensued, the upshot of which was, that their three proprietresses descended from the vehicle, and entered the Viscount's house.

“Now, my dear Leybourne,” said Blanche Devereux, in an ‘aside’ to her cousin, as our four friends were adjourning from the luncheon-table to the drawing-room, “pray, be most amiable to our affectionate aunt and her familiar spirits ; and do not let a succession of smiles be wanting during the time they honor your roof ! Lucy has shown me her anonymous letter, and from the ill-disguised caligraphy, I shrewdly suspect it to be the production of none other than the accomplished Charlotte Dundas, whose pothooks and hangers are, to

me, as “familiar as household words !” *Courage mon brave !* and now to assume your most off-hand and killing air !”

We shall not weary our readers with a minute description of how affable and pleasant Lord Leybourne made himself ; how enthusiastically Mrs. Lorton Devereux raved of the Highlands and everything Scottish—praised poodles, Lady Conolly, Tartan dresses, plumed bonnets, and other weaknesses of the “weird sisters three !” how amiable, happy, and lovely, looked, and spoke, and felt, sweet Lucy Leybourne ; nor how surprised was Lord Verondale to find his friends wasting so much “sweetness on the desert air” of their spiteful and uninteresting visitors.

Suffice it to say, that Lady Sarah Fitz-Walter left her nephew’s house, with her belief in the veracity of Miss O’Gorman’s authentic report very sadly shaken, although she would not, for a moment, allow such to

be the case, even to her two attendant familiars.

As for little Mrs. Dundas, she positively felt a kind of indescribable persuasion that her idolatrously-worshipped, truth-enshrined Lady Conolly might not be quite as infallible as the Pope, after all !—But, as a matter of course, she kept this to herself.

“Perhaps,” said she, mentally, “Lord Leybourne did *not* suffer from a violent cold, in spite of Lady Conolly’s assuring me of it as a fact !”

“Ah ! how the heart of Charlotte Dundas (figuratively) bled at thought of having to doubt the assertions of her adored Lady Conolly !

To describe what Jacobina McBean felt, would be difficult indeed !—Her *mind*—(so-called by courtesy, and out of respect to the sweet sex to which she belongs !) was in a state of chaotic hubbub !—She began to suppose—

But, again, I say, it is useless attempting to describe aught of the imaginings of the fair Caledonian—her intellects were obscured in a dense Scotch mist !

In fine, the Three Graces were completely muddled, amazed, mystified, confounded, and wofully disappointed.

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Lucy, Blanche, Leybourne, and Vernondale, had not ridden far on their way to the Park, when they chanced to pass a family-coach (such a "light of other days" as it was !) in size rather larger than "Richardson's Itinerant Theatre," within whose capacious body sat Lady Conolly, "Brownie," the Widow Wynne, Misses Selina and Kitty Sidebotham, and my Lady Martha Foljambe's housekeeper's step-sister's mistress, the oft-quoted Glorvina O'Gorman herself !

Oh, reader—dear reader ! had you but beheld

the wildly-staring eyes, the painfully wide-opened mouths, the wonder-stricken countenances of those six gentlewomen, you never could have forgotten them !

Mrs. Lorton Devereux bowed graciously to the party, *en passant* ; but no responsive bend did she receive from any of the half-dozen occupants of that cumbrous ark-upon-wheels, who, poor ladies ! all fancied themselves victims of optical delusion — they *would* not believe the evidence of their eleven eyes (Glorvina O’Gorman had but *one* !) ; and, in fact, as Selina Sidebotham afterwards expressed it to Mrs. Dundas—

“ We were so paralysed with wonderment, that no one could stir hand or foot ! ”

“ What can be the matter with these poor, dear, ridiculous old dames ? ” exclaimed Lord Ashley Ferrars, riding up to Lucy’s side, just as my Lady Conolly’s family-coach rolled “ slow and stately by ” with its transfixed burthen, whose eyes and mouths opened wider as

they witnessed the increase to the equestrian party. "By Jove! they look as though they had been done in wax by the skilful hand of Madame Tussaud!"

"Not a bad idea of yours, Ferrars!" said Lord Vernondale; "truly, Blanche, you have the most extraordinary set of bowing acquaintances I ever beheld!"

"Will you go with us to the Opera to-night, Ashley?" asked Lord Leybourne, carelessly.

"Thank you; but I fear I am engaged to accompany Lovell Crewe to the Duchess of Shafton's."

"As you please," rejoined the Viscount, with a sly glance at Lucy, "I thought, perhaps, you might like to join us. My mother has left Idonia and Mary at Churchill's for a few days, Alicia having accompanied her back to the Castle, and—but, of course, if you are engaged to—"

“Are Idonia and Mary to be of your party?” asked Ferrars, hastily.

“I believe so.”

“Then I—perhaps—on second thoughts, I think I *should* like to hear Grisi this evening.”

“But what would that touchy Lovell Crewe say?” suggested Blanche, mischievously watching Lord Ashley’s momentarily-increasing colour, “if you were to cry off an engagement at the eleventh hour?”

“Who cares what Lovell Crewe may say?” exclaimed Lord Ashley, pettishly; “Leybourne, I shall be delighted to accompany you to the Opera.”

“Very good. Dine with us at a quarter to seven.”

CHAPTER XIV.

With caution judge of possibility ;
Things thought unlikely, e'en impossible,
Experience often shows us to be true.

SHAKESPEARE.

As in a dream
I see him here, and scarce believe my eyes.

DRYDEN.

There's a dark spirit walking in our house,
And swiftly will the destiny close on us.

SCHILLER.

“ AT last, then, dearest Clare,” said Frederica Elverland, as she and the Marchioness of Avon-

mere took their seats in the Opera-house, "I have gained one step towards launching you upon the sea of London-life ! You have been cooped up at the Abbey far too long to be either good for health of mind or body ;—ditto in the Marquis's case ;—and if I be not greatly mistaken, you will both feel all the better for this evening's mild attempt at dissipation."

Clare smiled brightly on her friend ; and her young spirit already felt elated by the light and brilliancy of the scene around her, which gave to her sweet face all that it required to render her perfectly beautiful.

"I hope William will be here before the second act of the ' Lucrezia ' commences," she said, "it is such a favorite opera of his ; and as he has, strange to say, never yet heard Grisi, I should be sorry he should miss her splendid acting and singing in the last scene."

"I dare say he will be here in less than an

hour," rejoined Frederica, "Plantagenet will be sure to make a move as soon as possible. How provoking it was of Lord George to insist on their dining with him to-day ! Elverland would have refused, point blank, had he not deemed such a proceeding impolitic. Ah ! there are some friends of ours !—what a party !—two boxes full ! How lovely Lucy Leybourne looks, does she not ? Who is that now leaning over Mrs. Lorton Devereux's chair ? What an exceedingly pleasing face !—it is not handsome, and yet—do you know, Clare, that face strongly recalls Noel Vernon to my recollection !"

"That is not singular, Freddie," replied the Marchioness, smiling, "seeing that you are looking at his half-brother, Vernondale."

Frederica certainly now regarded the object of her enquiry with increased interest when she discovered who he was ; but neither did she, nor Clare, betray any lurking weakness flattering to Noel's vanity on the occasion.

They were happy wives and mothers ; and their hearts were good and true woman-hearts !

Smiles and nods were now exchanged between the opposite neighbours, and Lucy and Lady Idonia Fitz-Walter both evidently greeted with pleasure Clare's first appearance in the gay world, as Marchioness of Avonmere ! The overture, or rather, " introduction," to " Lucrezia Borgia " now commenced, and the house already seemed as full as it could hold, though numbers still kept pouring in.

Eyes of all colours, and *lorgnettes* of every description, were continually turned towards the Countess of Elverland's box ; and no wonder, for two of the loveliest women in London occupied it ; but one of them, the fair one, seemed perfectly unconscious of the sensation she was exciting. She had come to hear the music, and was drinking in every note with unhacknied delight.

Frederica passionately loved music, also ; but there was no novelty in the Opera to her, who visited it at least every other night in the season ; so *she* had eyes to look about her, as well as ears to hear.

Freddie could not help knowing that she was beautiful, but she was used to being admired, and, therefore, had time to behold, with a certain exultant pride, the admiration caused by the new, pure loveliness of her friend.

One tall, dark, supremely-handsome man in the pit-stalls, she remarked especially, who scarcely ever moved his splendid eyes from Clare's face. He seemed positively spell-bound.

Even after the " Lucrezia " had begun, those large eyes only momentarily glanced towards the stage, to be again directed towards Clare.

Frederica at last felt indignant at the pertinacity with which this stranger continued to stare at the Marchioness, but did not make any

observation on the subject to her companion, lest she should be annoyed.

The first act was not over, when the Marquis and Lord Elverland entered the box.

"I am so glad you are come, William," whispered Clare, as her husband seated himself behind her, as much out of sight as possible.

"Are you enjoying it, dearest?" asked Avonmere, looking with proud delight into the radiant face turned towards him.

"Oh! so much, William! but I wanted you to enjoy it with me."

The Marquis smiled fondly on her, but a pang at the same moment shot through his heart.

Never had Clare looked so like Ginevra!

The "introduction" to the second act was being played, when Frederica again caught the same large eyes fixed upon Clare, with an expression she could not define. Anger, admiration, wonder, curiosity, and even anguish, seemed concentrated in that full glance.

"Do you know who that man is, Plantagenet?" asked Frederica, in a low voice, at the same describing where the unknown sat.

As she spoke, he stood up.

"Not in the least," replied the Earl, "what a handsome, *distinguè* fellow he is! He looks like a foreigner. Avonmere! you know all the notables abroad; perhaps you can satisfy Freddie's curiosity as to the identity of that Italian-faced individual, standing up next to a portly matron, with a red and gold thing on her head? No—not that one—nearer this way. Don't you see a tall, dark man who seems to have eyes for no one but the Marchioness?"

Avonmere now rose from his chair, and leaned forward between Clare and Frederica.

The latter saw the stranger turn his gaze from Clare to the Marquis, and in an instant the handsome face seemed perfectly convulsed.

A gasp of agony sounded in Clare's ear.

She cast a terrified glance upon her husband,

and caught his hand. His head sank upon her shoulder ; his countenance no longer wore a lifelike hue ; the eyes were closed ; and blood flowed from between the ashy lips !

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CHAPTER XVI.

Gloom is upon thy silent hearth,
O silent house !

Felicia Hemans.

He tried to smile, and half succeeding, said —
' Yes, I must die,'—and hope for ever fled.

CRABBE.

This little nurseling, take it to thy love,
And shield the bird unfledged, since gone the parent
dove.

CAMPBELL.

L'homme de paix me parla ainsi.

Vicaire Savoyard.

CLARE is sitting on the bed ; her arm is
around her husband, and his head rests upon
her bosom.

They are alone. Mrs. Wilmington and Lady Vernondale have just left the chamber with the physician.

“Thank God ! my sweetest wife, that He has been pleased to restore to me sufficient strength to speak what has so long been on my mind. Perfect confidence shall at last exist between us, and I shall then die in peace. Nay, dear love, do not weep ! I go but a short time before you.”

“William ! William !” sobbed Clare, bending down over the upturned face, and pressing her lips upon the pale brow.

Three evenings ago, the young Marchioness, full of hope and happiness, had shone

“A bright, particular star,”

amongst the fairest and noblest of the land—a long life of love and prosperity, with one who

hourly endeared himself more to her, smiling before her!

Now, what a change! what a contrast!

The brilliant theatre—the ravishing strains—the light—the loveliness—the glistening jewels—the smiles—the bright and exquisite flowers—the “pomp and circumstance” of fashionable existence—WERE!

The darkened chamber—hushed voices—tearful eyes—pale and sorrowing faces—and the already falling shadow of death—ARE!

Truly “in the midst of life we are in death!”

“Clare! I have kept a secret from you—a secret known only to Beppa Monti and Luigi Pianori. It was not from a want of confidence in you, my precious one, that I have hitherto preserved it from you; but from a fear of depressing your gentle spirit should you learn what that room in the North Gallery contains.”

Clare trembled with suspense.

The mysterious allusion in Gertrude's letter to Amy De Lacey was seldom long absent from her mind; and now she was about to be admitted into the secret—to learn what was “the skeleton in the closet.”

“That room,” resumed Avonmere, in faint and tremulous accents, “to which I so constantly retired to reflect and pray, contains all that remains of poor Ginevra!”

“Ginevra?” gasped Clare.

“Yes, dearest,” continued the Marquis, “Ginevra's body lies in that apartment. It was her desire that we should rest together in the grave. You will see, my Clare, that we are not divided in death?”

Lady Avonmere's lips moved, but she could not utter a sound.

“Clare! I would fain have told you *how* Ginevra died; but the—”

“I know the sad history, William; and my

heart has clung the closer to you since I learned it."

"You know it, Clare? how? from Beppa Monti?"

"From Gertrude, to whom Beppa related it."

Avonmere closed his eyes, and remained some minutes silent.

"Clare!"

"Yes, William?"

"You saw that—that fearful being—that treacherous fiend, who killed Ginevra? his *Evil-Eye* rested upon you! he beheld in you another Ginevra—Clare! that man was Camillo di Losenghi!"

"Good Heavens!" cried Lady Avonmere, pale with horror.

"Yes, Clare!" resumed the Marquis, wildly, "you have seen the demon who blighted my Ginevra's young existence, and

whose fell glance has now stricken your husband !”

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The Marquis of Avonmere had inherited from his mother a delicacy of constitution, and morbid nervous system, which the events of his life had but too fatally tended to increase. Day by day, since Ginevra's death, he had struggled with the insidious enemies, mental as well as physical, which lurked within him ; but to no purpose. Consumption rankled in his veins, and an overwrought imagination but too surely aided in its development. For some months, he had felt the unseen miner doing its work of destruction at his life's-core, but had exerted himself to the utmost to conceal the truth from his gentle wife. Two years back, he would gladly have hailed death,

had it not been for his helpless child ; but now, Clare and *her* child seemed to bid him stay with *them*—he had now fresh, dear ties to bind him to the earth.

But it could not be ! “The fiat had gone forth !”

The recognition of Ginevra’s destroyer had sealed William Pierrepont’s doom !

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Mr. Graham, who had been sent for at Lord Avonmere’s own request, is now alone with the dying man.

The Marquis has been unfolding to him certain incidents of his past life, especially touching upon the melancholy circumstances attending the death of Ginevra, and their ill-starred intimacy with Camillo di Losenghi.

“Can such a thing be permitted, Mr. Graham ? Reason and revealed religion tell

me 'no ;' but, oh ! when I look back upon all I have heard and seen—when I think of my own sad experience—witness me here, lying on the bed of death, stricken as it were in an instant—something within me whispers—'such things are !' I but looked upon that hated face, and—"

"My friend," returned Mr. Graham, with impressive seriousness, "I own that what you have told me is most strange and startling, and quite sufficient, to the ignorant and superstitious mind, to implant a fixed belief in the reality of this horrible gift. But, pray, reflect for a moment on the folly, surely I may say, the impiousness of such a belief on the part of an educated Christian. Can you imagine that a Being, infinitely good and infinitely just, would bestow upon one of his creatures the awful power of working mischief and death, (in spite of the volition even of the unhappy individual cursed with this supposed influence,)

with a mere glance from his eyes? Let me beseech you, my dear Lord, to disabuse yourself of this terrible delusion!"

"But that night—that dreadful night, when I returned to Amalfi—when I heard from my poor Ginevra's own lips—" began the Marquis, starting up.

"You must not thus agitate yourself, Lord Avonmere," interrupted Mr. Graham; "I entreat you to be calm. Doubtless, the death of the Marchioness was accelerated, if not entirely caused, by this Italian villain; but, do you not think, considering the critical situation of your wife, and her naturally sensitive temperament, that such an outrageous insult as was offered her by this vile Losenghi, was sufficient in itself to account for what followed, without supposing the Prince to be possessed of the "*Mal' Occhio*?"

The Marquis was silent.

"Your own health," continued Mr. Graham, "has, you say, to your own knowledge, been

gradually giving way for some time past. Your nerves have been unstrung, and rendered more acute, by the weakness of the body. Is there anything, then, contrary to nature, in the lamentable effect which the sudden recognition of this unprincipled wretch has had upon you ? Believe me, my dear friend, this superstitious credence is unworthy of you !”

“ True, true, Mr. Graham ; you are right ! it is unworthy of a dying Christian, who believes in Gospel-truth and the efficacy of a Redeemer’s atonement. Let us dismiss the subject, and make good use of the time that is mercifully left to me !”

Avonmere then informed the good Rector of what he had already told Clare, namely, that the coffin containing the remains of Ginevra, (the body had been embalmed in Italy,) now lay in the Northern Gallery of the Abbey ; and that it was his request that it should be placed by his side in the Pierrepont vault in the parish-church of Avonmere.

“And now, Mr. Graham, I would fain see my children—perchance for the last time; and then let my darling wife, her mother, and Lady Vernondale, be summoned to partake of the Lord’s Supper with me. My poor Clare! my good and beautiful! I must leave thee—and Vincenzo—”

Tears fell fast down the now flushed cheeks of the Marquis.

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CHAPTER XVI.

Sir Walter Vivian all a summer's day
Gave his broad lands until the set of sun
Up to the people : thither flock'd at noon
His tenants, wife, and child.

THE PRINCESS.

My life is weariness to me ;
I wish the glare of daylight o'er,
But when the sun sets in the sea,
I pray he ne'er may wake me more.
For nought brings pleasure, change, or cheer,
'Tis all the same—blank, cold, and drear.

MRS. ACTON TINDALL.

When sorrow wrings thy gentle heart,
O, wilt thou let me cheer thee ?

BURNS.

FOUR years has Clare Avonmere been a

widow ; and a quarter of that time has Gertrude Vernon been a wife. Pretty little Gertie is now Lady Wilmington-Talbot, and mistress of Seagrove Rookery, Suffolk, which estate, with the title of Baronet, has passed into the possession of Albert Wilmington, through the death of his uncle, the late Sir Charles Talbot.

Lady Talbot and her daughter, Annie, are at present residing in Germany, seeking by change of scene to soften the deep grief their irreparable loss has occasioned.

Our old friend, Noel, now Major Vernon, has retired from the Army, and returned to England some months, having distinguished himself in the Indian wars, in which he received a dangerous wound, necessitating the amputation of the left arm.

Having thus said a few brief words respecting some of our principal "*dramatis personæ*," we will proceed to business.

If our reader has taken the trouble to look at the first motto heading this chapter, he will see what the Poet-Laureate "Sir Walter Vivian" did with his grounds "all a summer's day." Just so, did young Sir Albert Wilmington-Talbot with "his broad lands, until the set of sun," on the joyful occasion of the christening of his son-and-heir, Charles Albert Wilmington-Talbot.

Seagrove Rookery was as full of company as it could well be, amongst whom were Mrs. Wilmington and Talbot, Clare and her little George, now Marquis of Avonmere, (for the hapless Vincenzo sleeps between his ill-fated parents in the vault of his ancestors); Lord and Lady Vernondale with their two children; Eleanor, the Dowager-Baroness; Harry Vernon and Lady Anne; Noel, the Punjaub hero; Lord Leybourne and his Lucy, together with three small honorable Fitz-Walters; the Earl and Countess of Elverland, with a fairy-like Lady Maude De Courcy,

and a baby Lord Varley ; Mr. and Mrs. Graham, &c., &c., &c.

Great rejoicings were there in the village and neighbourhood of Seagrove ; bon-fires, oxen roasted whole, mighty casks of potent October, *marquees*, cricket, bowls, foot-races, running in sacks, dancing, feasting, music, speechifying, kiss-in-the-ring, cheering, laughing, talking, rustic love-making, singing—and all the rest of it.

Happiness and satisfaction were unbounded ; and marvellously exuberant was the amount of loyalty expressed towards Sir Albert and Lady Wilmington-Talbot and their very juvenile heir.

Of course there was one old mumbling dame of the party, who squeaked into the ear of an octogenarian gossip, when the health of Sir Albert was given, and received with a deafening round of “ Kentish Fire ”—

“ Ah ! he be a fine, generous young man, sure enow, God bless him !—but he aint a *rale*

Talbot arter all. If our Miss Annie had but a' been a lad instead of a lass, it 'ud a' been all right. But there, Bess, it's no good talkin' about it, so let's e'en make the best on't."

Wise in her generation was this same ancient dame, for a better landlord than Sir Albert could not be; and as for Gertrude, she promises to be a model Lady-of-the-Manor.

Towards sun-set, when mirth and jollity were at their height amongst the tenantry, the the Dowager Lady Vernondale, leaning on the *only* arm of her son, the Major, found herself upon the terrace, where we have already seen them some years before.

The Baroness looks much the same as she did then; but Noel, besides the loss of a limb, has otherwise much changed. His figure is more manly and developed, and his superlatively handsome face is not a whit the less handsome for being bronzed and more *pronounced*; but there is a thoughtful and somewhat melancholy expression in it, especially

about the eyes and mouth, which show that he now knows what it is to feel deeply, and that life is no longer all sunshine.

The *past* fills the minds of both, as silently they pace along the broad gravel walk.

“ My own dear boy ! ” suddenly breaks from the lips of Eleanor Vernondale, whilst she fondly clasps the young man’s strong arm with both hands.

“ My own darling mother ! ” is the responsive endearment, as Noel’s beautiful but pensive eyes rest on Lady Vernondale’s still very lovely face.

“ You have seemed unusually depressed all this happy day, Noel.”

“ Have I, mother ? I fear I have never been over-cheerful since my return from India.”

“ Far from it ; I have scarcely ever seen you smile ; and this it is which makes your fond old mother sadder than she is wont to be.

Surely my Noel does not still grieve for the loss of—of—”

“Georgiana Marsden?”

“Exactly. Georgiana Marsden—or, rather, Lady Fenton—is not worth a passing thought. Can my Noel—”

“Nay, mother dearest,” interrupted Noel, with a proud, yet melancholy, smile, “as Romeo says—

‘I have forgot that name, and that name’s woe!’

Believe me, I now never think of Lady Fenton but with a feeling of self-congratulation that she never became wife of mine! No, no, Georgiana Fenton has nothing in the world to do with my *tristesse*, on my honor!”

The young soldier heaved a sigh, nevertheless—which might seem to belie the exact truth of what he had just asseverated.

The Baroness had long since guessed at the

real state of the case, but, not liking to attack the fortress of her son's confidence openly, had recourse to, what is called in common parlance, a system of *pumping*.

"You do not regret being once more amongst us, Noel?"

"Most decidedly not!" and an affectionate smile accompanied the words.

"You have not been disappointed by the reception you have met from our numerous friends?"

"Disappointed, darling mother—how could that be? And yet—"

"Yet what, Noel?"

"In *one* instance, I—I—had expected—"

"You hesitate. Surely you may speak openly to *me*, my darling boy!"

"Mother, it were better I held my tongue. I have been so spoiled since I came back to Old England, that I have become little less than an unreasonable and exacting fool!"

“Noel,” resumed Eleanor Vernondale, quoting from a once popular play—

“I would not hear your enemy say so,
Nor shall you do mine ear that violence!”

“But what else am I, mother, if I be not an exacting fool? Have I not been petted, and made much of, ever since I brought my *one* arm amongst you all? And have I not, (by your own shewing, such is the case,) returned the kindness and affection of my friends by for ever displaying a ‘woful countenance?’ *Ma mère*, you have each, and every one of you, been but too good to me!”

“Each and every one,” repeated the Baroness, “then why did my Noel just now say that his expectations in *one* instance had been disappointed?”

“Because, to repeat it once more, your Noel has become an unreasonable and exacting fool!”

“ Now, indeed, Noel, you do yourself injustice ! You are not, nor ever were, either exacting or unreasonable. You, evidently, have some hidden cause for a depression so unnatural to your character. You say that you no longer feel a shadow of regret for Georgiana Fenton, and yet—Noel, I entreat you, do not keep anything from me !”

The Baroness's voice became tremulous, and Major Vernon hastily turned aside his head to avoid the searching glance of her anxious eyes.

“ Noel, my dearest boy, can you not confide in me ?”

“ In everything, my best and kindest mother !”

“ Then let me know why you always look so sad, so pre-occupied ?”

Noel Vernon's arm trembled beneath Lady Vernondale's hand, and she saw by the expression of his face, that an internal struggle was going on in his heart.

“ You remember our conversation on this terrace-walk when last we visited my poor uncle ?”

“ Every word of it.”

“ You then questioned me as to my feelings for my cousin Clare, mother ?”

“ I did.”

“ What those feelings were, I scarcely understood myself. During the voyage out to India, Clare was for ever in my thoughts. Whenever, in fancy, I wandered homewards, she was always by my side. ‘ Absence,’ in my case at least, had made ‘ the heart grow fonder,’ and I almost determined on writing to my Uncle Wilmington, begging him to grant me permission to ask Clare to be my wife. Second thoughts, nevertheless, determined me to defer doing so, at all events, for a time. Then came my intimacy with the Marsdens; and, ere long, I congratulated myself on not having rashly addressed my uncle, on the spur of the moment; for I soon found myself des-

perately in love with Georgiana—quite a different sentiment to that which Clare Wilmington had inspired. Not that I then loved Clare less than formerly; but I discovered, or imagined that I did, that my affection for her had been always that of a brother—that, in fact, we were *Only Cousins*! When, however, time showed Georgie Marsden in her true colours; when the first pangs of wounded pride, betrayed confidence, and disappointed passion, gave place to reflection and contempt for the artful girl's treachery, the image of Clare again rose up before me, in all her native purity and sweet truthfulness, and it was with a strange mingling of feelings that I remembered she was no longer Clare Wilmington. I strove to console myself by the assurance that all was for the best; that my uncle would never have countenanced my marriage with his daughter; and that, as for Clare herself, she had never regarded me as other than a brother."

Noel paused ; and Eleanor Vernondale smiled thoughtfully, as a sigh escaped her lips.

“ Noel,” she said, in a low voice, “ do you still cherish more tender sentiments for Clare Avonmere than those of a cousin !”

“ Oh, mother ! she is dearer to me than life itself ! there is no longer a doubt in my heart as to my feelings towards her. When we first met, after my return home, I felt that my all of happiness depended upon her—and wondered at myself for ever having been captivated by a pretty *ignis-fatuus*, like Georgie Marsden, when I had once known such a being as Clare Wilmington !”

“ And what has since passed between you, Noel ?”

“ Nothing, mother !” replied Major Vernon, sadly, “ Clare treats me with a sort of affectionate reserve, and evidently avoids being left alone with me.”

“ She is now free, Noel.”

“ Yes ; but not for me, mother.”

“ And why not ?”

“ She looks upon me as a cousin—nothing more !”

“ You take that for granted, dear boy. You have never tested the state of Clare’s feelings.”

“ Do I not test them each hour I am in her society ; and meet kind, but cool, indifference, in every word and look ?”

“ You do not understand Clare, Noel—you never did.”

“ How mother ?”

The Baroness did not reply immediately ; she was pondering something in her mind. At length, she said—

“ I scarcely know whether a person can ever be justified in betraying a confidence—and yet—for your most dear sake, my darling son, I am sorely tempted to do so.”

Noel became greatly agitated, as divers

hopes and misgivings, raised by his mother's words, darted into his heart and brain.

"Noel! our sweet Clare has loved more than once!"

Lady Vernondale hesitated, as though still in doubt as to the justifiableness of the line of conduct she was pursuing.

"She loved Avonmere," exclaimed Major Vernon, almost breathlessly, "or—or she would never have consented to become his wife!"

"True, Noel; and a perfect wife she was; but Clare loved another, deeply, devotedly, hopelessly, before she married the Marquis."

"And that other was—"

"Noel Vernon!"

"Mother! you cannot mean it! Could I have been so blind? Good Heavens! did Clare—Tell me, tell me, dearest mother, on what authority you say this? from whose lips did you learn—"

“ Clare Wilmington’s. The secret is out. Whether I have done right or wrong, I have not courage to ask my conscience. But, oh, Noel ! I could not bear to see you suffer ! ”

Noel Vernon started as from a dismal dream into the full sunshine of bright reality.

With question upon question did he ply his mother, until he had learned the story of Clare’s heart-trials ; and then he exclaimed—

“ Oh, what a weight is lifted from my spirit ! What hours of mental suffering are now for ever vanished ! This very evening, this very hour will I seek Clare, and pour out all my heart to her. ”

“ But, be cautious, Noel, not to betray to her what I have now told you. Clare’s feelings are delicate and sensitive as they are warm and true. Go to her, Noel ! and my blessing follow you ! ”

A fond kiss was exchanged between the mother and her only son.

The Baroness then pursued her way to the scene of merry-making, whilst Noel flew towards the house. As he was entering the hall-door, he encountered Frederica Elverland.

“Major Vernon,” exclaimed Frederica, with a smile, “I congratulate you !”

“Upon what ?” asked Noel, crimsoning up to the forehead, as though the Countess knew what was in his mind.

“Your recovered good-looks,” resumed Frederica, “I can now once more recall my acquaintance of former days. But whither are you flying in such wild haste ?”

“Into the house,” replied Noel, consciously.

“So it would appear,” laughed Lady Elverland ; “but is your errand of too pressing a nature to allow of your giving me your arm as far as the dancing-tent ? Nurse is performing on ‘the light fantastic,’ amongst the rest, and therefore I have just been in to put my

little Maude to bed myself. Sir Albert has requested all of us 'quality-folk' to join the rustic *corps-de-ballet*, in a grand, final country-dance, and my fair hand has already been promised to a certain burly Farmer Rounce; so I am hastening back to the scene of action."

"Really, my dear Lady Elverland," stammered Noel, "I—I—of course I should only be too happy to—but—"

"You would rather be excused?" exclaimed Frederica, with another merry laugh, "well, 'gang yer ways, gude mon,' as they say in Scotland; but don't look for a character for politeness from me again!"

"Lady Elverland," said Noel, still embarrassed, "I am sure you would pardon my seeming rudeness, if you knew—Have you any idea where—where—Clare is to be found?"

"In the library, I believe," answered Frederica, at once, with all a woman's quick-sightedness in love-affairs, guessing that something

had occurred of a tender nature to cause so sudden a change in the expression of the Major's handsome countenance, "she is fatigued, and came in with Maudey and me to enjoy a little coolness and quiet. *Au revoir*, most ungallant of Punjaub heroes !"

Saying which, she tripped lightly down the steps, leaving Noel Vernon to proceed to the library, *ad libitum*.

The Countess Frederica smiled to herself as she went along.

"I do believe they will come together, after all !" she soliloquised, "and what more natural ? They were intended for each other from the beginning.—Poor darling Clare, has been almost as lugubrious as Noel himself for the last two months ; the reason why, I never, for a moment doubted. Well, may this night be the opening of a new era to them both, is the hearty wish and prayer of theirs sincerely, and, on one side, most affectionately ! How absurd it now appears, to think that I once

dreamed of wearing the willow for that same maimed veteran ! Now—would I give my dear old Planty for a score of Noel Vernons ? —Freddie Elverland rather fancies *not* !”

CHAPTER XV.

Per correr miglior acqua alza le vele
O mai la navicella del mio ingegno,
Che lascia dietro a se mar sì crudele.

DANTE.

The book is completed,
And closed like the day,
And the hand that has written it,
Lays it away.

LONGFELLOW.

I AM, what folks call, "a decided old bachelor," but no one, I believe, attaches either of the epithets--"fidgetty," "spiteful," "cross-grained," "disagreeable," or "prying," to the

“old bachelor;” for my friends always appear genuinely glad to see me, and are perpetually inviting me to visit them; especially my friends about Calverley and Limehurst. Now, were I, “fidgetty,” “spiteful,” “cross-grained,” or “disagreeable,” methinks I should not receive so many pressing invitations; I am neither a “tuft,” a “lion,” or a “millionaire.” But, “prying?—I fear I am a bit of a “*Paul Pry*,” for, see below! all the latest news I have contrived to scrape together, concerning most of the chief personages mentioned in this *Story of a Neighbourhood*, during a late *séjour* at the Warren, with Mrs. Wilmington and her son Talbot.

Whom to tell my readers of first, I scarcely know. Suppose I take them as they come into my head.

Having just spoken of my single-hearted hostess and her younger son, we will commence with them.

Mrs. Wilmington, gentle, kind, and simple

in manner as ever, looks quite her age ; for her hair is nearly white, and her slight figure fast losing its elasticity and uprightness. She speaks often of her good husband, and appears to consider that the world at large lost a *Solomon* when George Wilmington died. Nor does she forget poor Lord Avonmere and his idiot-boy ; for she seems to take a sad pleasure in repeating, again and again, the romantic and melancholy history of Ginevra, the first Marchioness, and all connected with the no longer mysterious cause of the Marquis's constant seclusion in that room in the Northern Gallery of the Abbey. Gertie has often since told me of the startling shock she and Lady Amy De Lacey received, on so strangely gaining an entrance to the "blue chamber," and discovering the coffin of Ginevra, bearing the date of her age and early death. Alas ! where is the mansion or cot without its "blue-chamber ?"

Talbot Wilmington is grown up into a fine, manly fellow ; but, much to his mother's an-

noyance, shows a decided anti-matrimonial taste. I shrewdly suspect his fair cousin Annie Talbot's marriage with Lawrence May, a rich young Suffolk squire, may have had something to do with Master Talbot's obstinate indifference to the rest of the gentle sex. However, there is plenty of time for him to change his mind yet ; as I dare say he will, when Miss *Right* appears !

"I wonder," Mrs. Wilmington said to me the other day, "if the dear boy really did care for Annie? At one time, I should have smiled at such a notion, for "*They Are Only Cousins !*" but, bless me ! when I look at Clare and Noel, Gertie and Albert, it would seem but natural that Talbot should have married Annie ; and a sweet creature she is !"

"Well, my dear friend," I replied, "surely two *cousinly* unions in your family are enough ! Were poor George alive now, I dare say he would not be the less well-pleased to find that Talbot and Annie were not to make a third

couple. Lawrence May does not look at all the sort of fellow soon to leave Annie a widow, as the Marquis did Clare !”

During an excursion in Devonshire, last Summer, I unexpectedly found myself within a few miles of the Dowager-Baroness Vernondale’s beautiful little dower-house, where I passed three or four days with her and her sister-in-law, Lady Talbot, who, since Annie became Mrs. Lawrence May, has almost entirely taken up her abode there.

Eleanor Vernondale, albeit she has half-a-score of grandchildren, and step-grand-children, still bids fair to be a modern *Ninon de L’Enclos*, for she is as graceful, gracious, beautiful, and bewitching a matron, as any in the three kingdoms. Heigho ! I once used to write sonnets and odes, and indite Valentines, to Nelly Talbot. And now to return to the Calverley neighbourhood again.

The Earl and Countess of Stalsfield are still living, and likely to live, although her lady-

ship has never recovered from the nervous shock she received on the occasion of her daughter Amy's elopement with that young—but it ill befits a christian to speak harshly of the dead! For, dead, poor Algernon De Lacey is; and it is whispered that he fell by his own hand, whilst in a fit of *delirium tremens*, somewhere abroad. Lady Ellen Dormer, the worthless partner in his guilt, is well-known at Vienna, as one of the most reckless gamblers and desperate *intriguantes* which that immoral city ever contained.

Poor Lady Amy resides constantly at Calverley Castle, with her two beautiful children, Walter and Clare; only now and then accompanying her wretched husband's uncle, General De Lacey, for a few weeks, to the seaside. Lady Amy is usually calm and cheerful, but never gay, and avoids all society, save that of her own relatives and intimate friends. I heard, on good authority, that one of the young Beauchamps—Edmond, I think

it was—was in hopes of tempting her again to become a wife; but poor Amy still remains a widow. Lord and Lady Leybourne continue to be the happiest of the happy; and, what with their two, and Lena and Donald Grey's six children, the Rectory-garden, when Lena and Lucy bring them on a visit to grandpapa and grandmama Graham, is made no better than a "howling wilderness," or a "bear-garden," according to my old friend, Peter Giles, the gardener's account.

The Honorable Cyprian and Lady Jane Churchill, are more intellectual, pedantic, and archæological than ever; and their one child is in consequence the most unnaturally precocious, unhappy production, you ever saw.

"What a blessing they have no more victims!" said Blanche Vernondale, to me one evening, when the unfortunate little Cyprian was being exhibited in a state of *clairvoyance*, or something of the sort, at one of Mr. Churchill's scientific *soirées*. I perfectly agreed

with the Baroness. Of the other junior branches and twigs of the Fitz-Walter tree—Idonia has refused three good offers, without assigning any reason, beyond that of being perfectly happy in a state of celibacy; Lady Alicia is married to the Marquis of Selbourne; Lady Mary, to her cousin, Ashley Ferrars; Hugh, to his old flame, Julia Beauchamp; and, to the infinite delight and satisfaction of Lord Stalsfield, Richard has carried off the Lady Susan Ferrars. Maude Fitz-Walter, a nursery-denizen when first my readers were introduced to this noble family, is now a reigning *belle*, and is likely to make a very brilliant match, ere long, if reports speak truly. As for Willie and Reginald, they are at an “awkward age;” so we will say nothing about them.

Noel Vernon and his lovely wife, the Marchioness of Avonmere, reside but little at the Abbey in Somersetshire, for Clare cannot forget certain melancholy events and memories,

connected with the stately building, which tend neither to the health of mind or body.

They have taken Vale Court, vacated by Colonel Vandeleur, in consequence of pretty, spoiled Lady Claudia having got it into her head, that the place did not agree with either herself or little Miss Horatia, who still continues the only child, unfortunately for her !—she stands a good chance of being as petted and humoured by the Colonel, as her mother was before her. If Lady Claudia had fallen out of conceit with Vale Court, Vale Court must be given up ; and *as* Lady Claudia *had* fallen out of conceit with Vale Court, it *was* given up ; and so Noel and Clare reigned there in her capricious ladyship's stead. Harry Vernon and Lady Anne remain tenants of the little Marquis of Avonmere, at Crossleigh Priory ; but I know not much about them ; they are not particular favorites of mine ; and besides they have no children. Now, a childless house

is a dead-letter "in the great account," at least, as regards the old bachelor ! and Lady Anne Vernon and her husband are not sufficiently attractive in themselves to draw him very often to the Priory.

Talking of the Priory, reminds me that old Beppa Monti (whom I first saw there), returned to her own friends at Naples, immediately after the death of poor little Vincenzo ; but Luigi Pianori still lingers in England, as a sort of gentleman-in-waiting to the young Lord Avonmere.

Now come we to Oakstone Park, which no longer echoes to the resounding voice of the once-imposing Thomasina ! No, times are changed at Oakstone.

The seductive Mr. Lawson has gone to *better* himself ; Mesdames Simpson and Lewis have also withdrawn their smiles from the housekeeper's room ; and more grave and less exclusive individuals have taken their places.

Cassandra, Lady Shirley, is dreadfully afraid of flirtations amongst the domestics, and would seem, judging by the staff she has around her, to select them for their superior ugliness; for really the new servants' faces, one and all, would ensure the success of the introductory portion of a pantomime, and save a manager the expense of grotesque masks.

Sir Robert and his lady get on capitally together, and might claim Mr. Harrison Ainsworth's "Flich of Bacon," at Dunmow, at any given moment.

Cassandra is on the best of terms with her Countess-step-daughter, and is not a little proud of having small De Coureys of Elverland for her grand children, although she shrinks from the ancient title of 'grand-mama.'

Sir Ranulph and Miss Etheldreda are gradually becoming more reconciled to the idea of calling a retired tradesman, "brother," but they

very seldom honor Oakstone with more than a ceremonious morning-call ; being, however, at the same time, always ready to show Sir Robert hospitality beneath the roof of Rokeby Place.

As for old Sacharissa, were it not for the constant attacks of rheumatic gout, which almost entirely confine her to her house, I believe she would, long ere this, have shouldered a double-barrelled gun, and marched over to Oakstone Park, to wash out, in the blood of Sir Robert and his Lady, the foul stain which Cassandra cast upon the shield of Rokeby of Rokeby, when she gave her hand to "that vile little snob, the cotton spinner."

Miss Sacharissa is now so ill that her persecuted kinsman and neighbour, Sir Samuel Culpepper, is in great hopes that the King of Terrors, by means of his agent, rheumatic gout, will soon remove the thorn in his (the Baronet's) side, which has made his life at Cul-

pepper Hall a martyrdom to him for some years past.

Dionysius and Sophia Wiley have had certain monies left them, enabling them to occupy furnished apartments in London, (which they speak of as their “house in Town !”) for some months in the year ; although they still retain Rose Bower as their “pretty little place in the country !” Mrs. Wiley is very thick with the present Lady Shirley, and befools her most successfully with choice flatteries ; continually referring, as a matter beyond any doubt, to the time when the “old maid spoiled” shall present Sir Robert with a sweet pledge of their wedded love. Cassandra blushes charmingly whenever this subject is brought upon the *tapis* by Sophia, and is evidently delighted thereat, for she is sure to fix an early day for the Wileys to dine at the Park, upon each several recurrence of the topic.

The Major and his wife are more inveterate

gossips, *pries*, and mischief-makers, than ever; and owing to her well-known talent in these same characters, Sophy has been fortunate enough to gain admission into my Lady Sarah Fitz-Walter's refined circle of exclusives (when in town), where she is looked upon with that admiration she so well deserves.

I think I have now said something about all the good people who have played their parts in our "*Story of a Neighbourhood*," except Nanny Tucker, Betsey Cox, the pretty housemaid at Rose-Bower, and her fellow-servant, Mr. Scoonesbury.

Nanny has never been to another ball, but sticks to her "short-horns," dairy, crops, "*fut-renderings*," etc., and still reigns "the peerless Una" amongst Kentish farmeresses.

Betsey Cox is now the wife of one of Lord Stalsfield's grooms, and the mother of one of a series of twins.

Roger Scoones, no longer "Scoonesbury,"

took to evil courses, and is at present in Australia, where we hope he may remain.

* * * * *

During my last stay at the Warren, Sir Albert and Lady Wilmington-Talbot, with their little Charles and his twin-sisters, Mary and Eleanor, came on a visit of a few days to grandmama, previous to their going to town for the season. Lord and Lady Vernondale were, at the same time, staying at Vale Court with Clare and Noel ; and the Elverlands with old Sir Robert Shirley.

“What a capital opportunity for a family-gathering !” said I to Mrs. Wilmington, “a long day, you know, with all the children and nurses, as well as the papas and mamas !”

The suggestion was acted upon, and May-morning (not one of the most genial, by-the-way) saw the lawn at the Warren dotted over

with some dozen small two-legged rabbits, ranging from nine or ten years down to two or three months, whilst parents and nurses kept watch over their proceedings, or carried them about in their arms. Sweet, pale Lady Amy De Lacey, accompanied by her sisters, Idonia and Maude, and her children, Walter and Clare (the elders of the juvenile group), were of the party; besides the Earl and Countess of Elverland, with their little Plantagenet Lord Varley, and three fairy-maidens, Maude, Clare, and Frederica De Courcy. A beautiful bevy it was!—But dearer and more beautiful than all the rest, in my partial old eyes, and I rather fancy in Mrs. Wilmington's, also—were my much-loved God-daughter, Clare Avonmere's three darlings, the child-Marquis and his half-brother and sister, Philip and Ginevra Vernon.

My old playfellow, Mary, and I were sitting in one of the windows in the drawing-room,

enjoying the innocent happiness before us, when Noel and Clare came in from the lawn, and joined us.

What a well assorted pair they are !

“Mama dear,” said Clare, with her delicious smile, “what a delightful thought was this May-day party of your’s !”

“This is the chief originator of it,” returned Mary, placing her hand affectionately on my old shoulder.

“Ah ! you dearest and kindest of God-papas !” exclaimed my loveliest and best of Marchionesses, giving me a kiss that caused me to wonder how it was that I could ever have made up my mind to remain an old bachelor, “how can we thank you sufficiently for making all our dear children so happy ?”

Then came another kiss.

“Upon my word, Clare !” cried her husband, laughing, “I shall grow jealous of this God-father of your’s !”

“As you please !” was the merry rejoinder, followed by a whisper in Noel’s ear, which called forth the reply—

“Very good, my Lady Marchioness ! but in the case of God-papa and yourself, even the *good-natured* half of the world cannot excuse such flagrant love-making as your’s, by saying — ‘What’s the harm ? — *They Are Only Cousins !*’

THE END.



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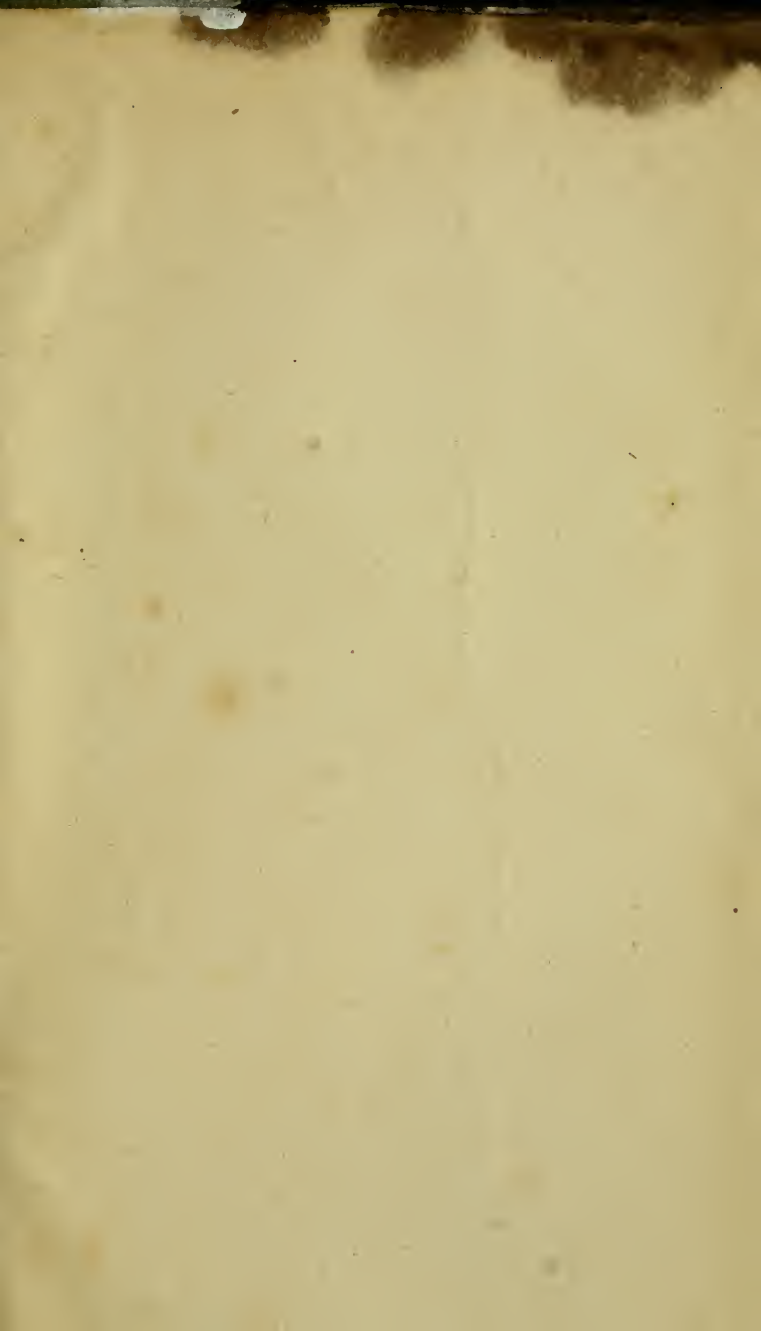
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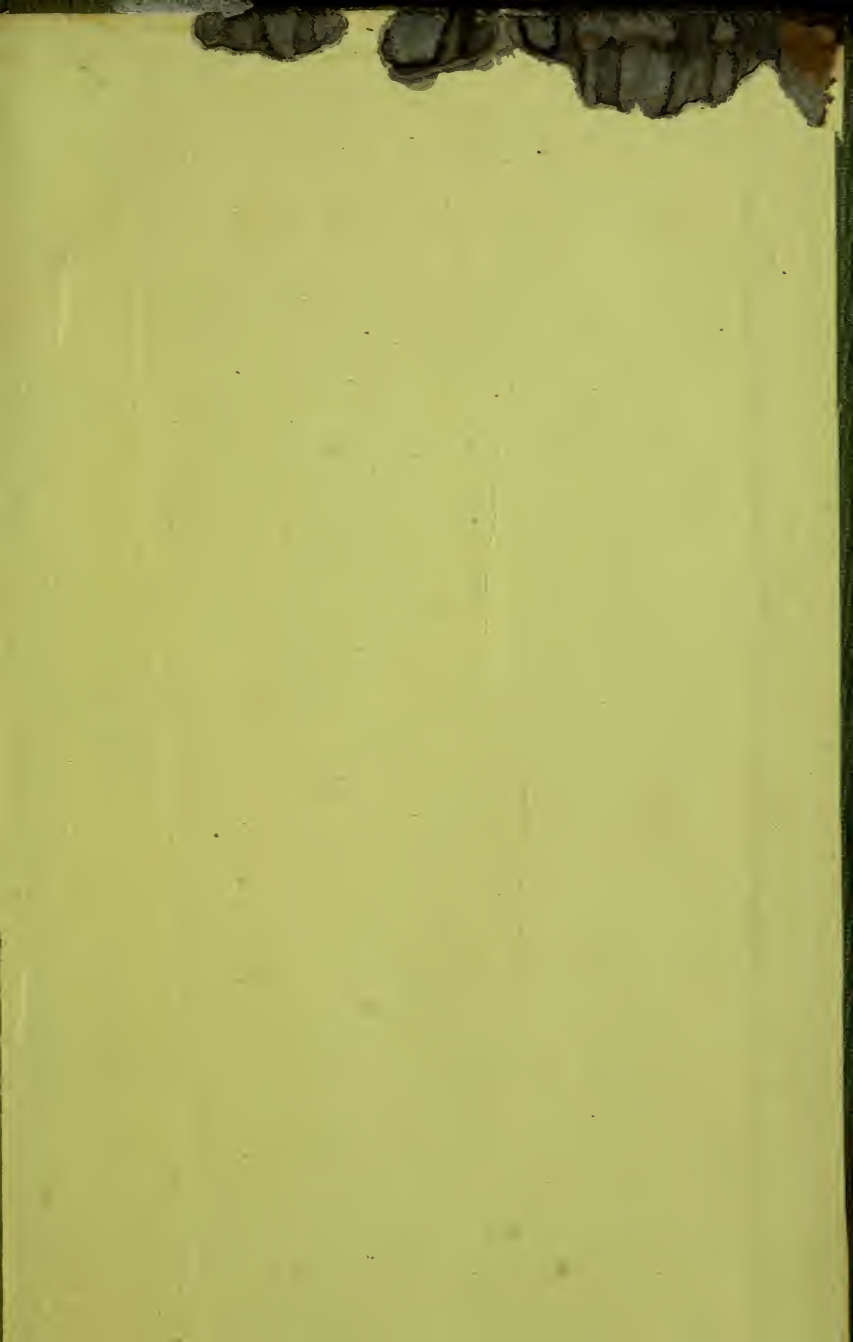
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